

THE ARGOSY.

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COURT NETHERLEIGH.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER I.

MISS MARGERV.

IN the midst of the Berkshire scenery, so fair and wealthy, this pleasant little place, Netherleigh, nestled in a grassy hollow. It was but a small, unpretending hamlet at the best, and its rustic inhabitants were hard-working and simple.

On the vast plain, surrounding it on all sides as far as the eye could reach, with its forests of trees, its hills and dales, and its sparkling streams of water, sat many a noble mansion of ancient or modern architecture, and of greater or lesser account and note in the county. Farm homesteads might be seen in plenty, surrounded by their out-buildings, their barns and ricks. Labourers' cottages were dotted about; labourers themselves toiled at their several occupations.

Flanking the village, and looking down upon it from its own eminence, rose the stately walls of Court Netherleigh: an imposing and beautiful edifice, with which none of those other mansions in the distance could compare. It was built of quaint, red brick, curious but bright-looking, and its gables and angles were picturesque in a high degree. Winding upwards from the village, you came upon the entrance gates, on the left of the road—great gates of wrought iron, with two smaller gates beside them. The lodges, built to match the house, stood a little back, one on each side the gates, roses and honeysuckle adorning the porches and lower windows. In one of these lodges, that on the left as you entered, lived the gatekeeper and his family; in the other the head gardener. Let us, in imagination, enter the gates.

It is Monday morning, the First of October, and a lovely day—warm, sunny, and genial. The gatekeeper's wife, a child clinging to her apron, runs to the door at the sound of steps, lest, haply, the great gates should need to be flung open. Seeing only a

Court Netherleigh.

foot-passenger, she drops a curtsy. Winding onwards through the drive that divides the park we see the house—Court Netherleigh, a wide, low, picturesque house; or perhaps it is only its great size that makes it look low, for it is three stories high. At the back, hidden by clustering trees, are the stables and out-offices. Extensive gardens lie around the house, which show a profusion of luscious fruits and choice vegetables, of smooth, green lawns, miniature rocks, grassy glades, and lovely flowers. Fine old trees give shade to the park, deer sport on its level grass. Altogether, the place is grand and beautiful, and evidently well-cared for. Whosoever it may be that reigns at Court Netherleigh reigns with no sparing hand.

We shall soon see her, for it is a lady. Ascending the three low broad stone steps that lead to the entrance hall, rooms lie on either hand. But none of these rooms are inhabited this morning. We must make our way to the back of the hall, go down a passage on the right of it, and open a door at the end.

A rather small room, its walls white and gold, the tint of its furniture a pale, subdued green, glass doors standing open to the outer air—that is what arrested the eye. It was called Miss Margery's parlour, and of all the rooms in Court Netherleigh it was the one that Miss Margery loved the best.

Miss Margery was seated in it this morning, near the table, sewing away at a child's petticoat, intended probably for one of the young ones at the lodge, or for some little waif in the hamlet. Miss Margery was no hand at fine work, she was wont to say, but at plain, useful work few could beat her, and she did not choose to be idle. She was a little woman, short and small, with a fair complexion and plain features, possessing more than her proper share of good common sense, and very active and energetic, as little people often are. She always wore silk. Her gown this morning was of her favourite violet colour, with a large lace collar fastened by a gold brooch, and black lace mittens under her lace-edged sleeves. She wore also a white clear-muslin apron with a braided border; the fashion of these aprons had come in when Miss Margery was a much younger woman, and she would not leave them off. She need not have worn a cap, for her hair was still abundant; but in those days middle-aged ladies wore caps, and Miss Margery was turned fifty. She wore her hair in ringlets, also the custom then, and the lace lappets of her cap fell behind them. This was Miss Upton, generally in the house called Miss Margery, the owner of Court Netherleigh and its broad lands.

The glass doors of the French window opened to the lawn, on which lay beds of mignonette and other sweet-scented flowers, a fountain playing in the midst. At the open window, one of them just outside, the other within, stood two young girls in the first blush of womanhood. The elder, Frances, had light hair and a piquant, saucy face; it had no particular beauty to recommend it, but her

temper was of the pleasantest, and her manners were charming. Hence Frances Chenevix was a general favourite. Her sister, one year younger than herself, and just nineteen, was beautiful. Her hair and eyes were of a bright brown, her features classically faultless, and the colour on her cheeks was delicate as a blush-rose. The sisters were of middle height, graceful and slender, and—there was no mistaking it—eminently aristocratic in bearing. They wore morning dresses of pink cambric—the mode in those by-gone days.

The elder, standing outside, had her hand to her eyes, shading them from the light, while she looked out steadily. The window faced the open country, on the side farthest from the village, which could not be seen from here. About half-a-mile distant might be seen the irregular chimnies of an old-fashioned house, called Moat Grange, with whose inmates they were intimate; and it was in that direction she was gazing.

"Do you happen to have a glass, Aunt Margery?" she suddenly asked, dropping her hand from her eyes and putting her head indoors to speak.

"A glass!" repeated Aunt Margery. "What sort of a glass, Frances?"

"Oh, I mean a telescope."

"There's one in the blue drawing-room. Adela can fetch it for you. It is in the table-drawer, my dear. But what is it you want to look at, Frances?" added Miss Upton, as Adela went in search of the glass.

"Only at a group in the road yonder. I cannot make out whether or not they are the people from the Grange. If so—they may be coming here. But they seem to be standing still; not to be moving."

"Some labourers mending the road," quietly spoke Miss Upton.

"No, Aunt Margery, I don't think so; I am nearly sure I can distinguish bonnets. *Something* is glittering in the sun."

"Do bonnets glitter, child?"

Frances laughed. "Selina has some shining grass in hers. Did you not notice it yesterday in church?"

"Not I," said Miss Upton; "but I can take your word for it. Selina Dalrymple is fonder of dress than a French doll. Lack of sense and a love of finery often go together," added Miss Upton, looking off her work to re-thread her needle: and Frances Chenevix nodded assent.

She stood looking out at the landscape: at the signs of labour to be seen around. The harvest was gathered, but out-door work, and plenty of it, lay to hand. Waggoners paced slowly beside their teams, with a crack now and again of the whip they held, or a word of encouragement to the leading horse. At this moment the sound of a gun was heard in the direction of Moat Grange. Frances went off into excitement.

"Aunt Margery, they are shooting!"

"Well, my dear, is that anything unusual on the First of October?"

spoke Miss Upton, smiling. "Robert Dalrymple would think it strange, I guess, if he did not go out to-day to bag his pheasants—poor things! I daresay it was his gun."

"And there's another report—and another!" cried the young lady. "They are shooting away! Adela must be *making* that glass, Aunt Margery."

Adela Chevenix had gone, listlessly enough, into the blue room: one of the magnificent drawing-rooms in front, its colours blue and silver. She opened the first table-drawer she came to; but did not see a telescope, or anything that looked like one. Then she glanced about her in other directions.

"Janet," she called out, hearing a maid servant pass the door, "do you know where the telescope is?"

"The spy-glass," returned the girl, entering, and calling the article by the name most familiar to her. "No, I don't, my lady."

"Aunt Margery said it was in this room."

"I know Miss Margery had it a few days ago. She was spying through it at that rick that was on fire over yonder. I'll look in the other rooms, my lady."

Adela sat down at the window, and fell into a train of thought. The maid came back, saying she could not find the glass: and the young lady forgot all about it, and sat on.

"Well," said Miss Margery, interrupting her presently, "and where's the glass you were sent for, Adela? And what's the matter?"

Adela started up; the blush-rose on her cheek deepening to a rich damask.

"I—I am afraid I forgot it, Aunt Margery. I can't find the glass."

Miss Upton walked to the further end of the large room, opened the drawer of a small table, and took out the glass.

"Oh," said Adela, repentantly; "it was in this table I looked, Aunt Margery."

"No doubt. But you should have looked in this one also, Adela. I hope the child has not got that Captain Stanley in her mind still, worrying herself over his delinquencies!" mentally concluded Miss Upton for her own private benefit.

They went back to the other room together. Frances Chenevix seized eagerly on the delayed glass, used it, and let it drop, with a disappointed air.

"They *are* road labourers, Aunt Margery, and nothing else."

"To be sure, my dear," calmly returned Miss Upton, settling to her sewing again.

The owner of Court Netherleigh, preceding Miss Margery, was Sir Francis Netherleigh; his baronetcy being of old creation. Sir Francis had lived at the Court with his wife, very quietly: they had no children: and if both of them were of a saving turn, not to say parsimonious, the fact might be accounted for, and justified by their circumstances. Some of his ancestors had been wofully extravagant;

and before he, Sir Francis, was born, his father and grandfather had combined together to cut off the entail. The title must of course go to the next male heir ; but the property—what was left of it—need not. However, it was eventually willed in the right direction, and Francis Netherleigh came into the estate and the title when he was a young man. He married a prudent, good woman, of gentle but not high lineage ; they cheerfully set themselves to the work of repairing what their forefathers had destroyed, and by the time Sir Francis was five-and-fifty years of age, the estate was righted and bringing in its full revenues again—fifteen thousand a year. Lady Netherleigh died about that time, and Sir Francis, as a widower, continued to live the same quiet, economical, unceremonious life that he and his wife had lived together. He was a religious, good man.

Naturally, the question, to whom Sir Francis would bequeath this fine estate, became a matter of speculation with sundry gossips—who always, you are aware, take more interest in our affairs than we take ourselves. The title would lapse ; that was known ; unless indeed Sir Francis should marry again and have a son. The only relatives he had in the world were three distant female cousins.

The eldest of these young ladies in point of years was Catherine Grant ; the second was Margery Upton, and the third was Elizabeth Cleveland. Margery and Elizabeth were cousins in a third degree to one another ; but they were not related to Catherine. The young ladies met occasionally at Court Netherleigh ; for Sir Francis invariably invited all three of them together ; never one alone. They corresponded at other times, and were good friends. The first of them to marry was Catherine Grant. She became the wife of one Christopher Grubb, a merchant of account in the City of London. This you must please understand was thirty years before this month of October we are writing of : and *that* again was many years prior to the present time.

In those days, to be in trade, no matter of how high a class it might be, was looked upon by the upper classes as next door to being in Purgatory. For all social purposes you might almost as well have been in the one as the other. Trading was a social crime, and nothing less. Opinions have wonderfully altered now ; but many people will remember that what I state is true. Therefore, when Catherine Grant, who was of gentle blood, so far forgot what was due to herself and her friends as to espouse Mr. Grubb, she was held to have degraded herself for ever. What with the man's name, and what with his having a counting-house, poor Catherine had effectually placed herself beyond the pale of society. A few sharp, stinging letters were written to her ; one by Sir Francis Netherleigh, one each by the two remaining young ladies ; they told her she had lost caste—and, in good truth, she had. From that hour Mrs. Grubb was consigned to the fate she was deemed to have richly merited—oblivion : and it may really be questioned whether in a few years she was not

absolutely forgotten. As the daughter of a small country rector, Miss Grant had not had the opportunity of moving in the higher class of society (except at Sir Francis Netherleigh's), and the other two young ladies did move in it. She had, in consequence, been already privately looked down upon by Elizabeth Cleveland—whose father, though a poor half-pay captain, was the Honourable Mr. Cleveland: and so, said Elizabeth, the girl had perhaps made a suitable match, after all, according to her station; all of which made it only the more easy to ignore Catherine Grubb's existence, and to forget that such a person had ever inhabited the civilised world. The next to marry was Elizabeth Cleveland. Her choice fell upon a spendthrift young peer, George Frederick Chenevix, Earl of Acorn: or, it may be more correct to say, his choice fell upon her. Margery Upton did not marry at all.

Years went on. Lord and Lady Acorn took care to keep up an intimacy with Sir Francis Netherleigh, privately hoping he would make the Earl his heir. The Earl needed it: he was a careless spendthrift. But Sir Francis never gave them, or any one else, the slightest sign of such an intention—and Lord Acorn's hopes were based solely on the fact that he had "nobody else to leave it to"; he had no male heir, or relative whatever, save himself. He, the Earl, chose to consider that he was a relative, in right of his wife.

Disappointment, however, as all have too often experienced, is the lot of man. Lord Acorn was fated to experience it in his turn. Sir Francis Netherleigh died: and, with the exception of legacies to servants, charities, and else, the whole of his property was left unconditionally to Margery Upton. Miss Upton, though probably as much surprised as anybody else, accepted the large bequest calmly, just as though it had been a matter of right, and she the heiress apparent; and she took up her abode at Court Netherleigh.

This was fourteen years ago: she was eight-and-thirty then; she was two-and-fifty now. Miss Upton had not wanted for suitors—as the world will readily believe: but she just shook her head and sent them adrift. It was her money they were after, not herself, she told them candidly; they had not thought of her when she was supposed to be portionless; they should not think of her now. Thus she had lived on at Court Netherleigh, and was looked upon as a somewhat eccentric lady; but a thoroughly good woman and kind mistress.

And the Acorns? They had swallowed their bitter disappointment with a good grace in public; and set themselves out to pay the same assiduous court to Miss Upton that they had paid to Sir Francis. "I don't think hers will be a long life," Lady Acorn said in confidence to her lord, "and then all the property must come to us; to you and to me: she has no other relative in the world." Common sense being common sense, the world at large took up the same notion, and Lord Acorn was universally regarded as the undoubted heir to the broad lands of Netherleigh. As to the peer himself,

nothing short of a revelation from heaven would have shaken his belief in the earnest of their future good fortune; and, between ourselves, he had already borrowed money on the strength of it. Never did a more sanguine or less prudent man exist than he. The young ladies now staying with Miss Upton were his two youngest daughters. In the gushing affection professed for her by the family generally, the girls had been trained to call her "Aunt Margery": though, as the reader must perceive, she was not their aunt; in fact, but very distantly related to them.

"Tiresome things!" cried Lady Frances, toying with the glass still, but looking towards the distant group of labourers. "I wish it had been the Dalrymples on their way here."

"You can put on your hats and go to Moat Grange, as you seem so anxious to see them," observed Miss Upton. "And you may ask the young people to come in this evening, if you like."

"Oh, that will be delightful," cried Frances, all alert in a moment. "And that young lady who was at church with them, Aunt Margery—are we to ask her also? They called her Miss Lynn."

"Of course you are. What strangely beautiful eyes she had."

"Thank you, Aunt Margery," whispered Adela, bending down with a kiss and a bright smile, as she passed Miss Upton. Not that Adela particularly cared for the Dalrymples; but the days at Court Netherleigh were, to her, so monotonous.

The girls set forth in their pretty gipsy hats of straw, trimmed with a wreath of roses. It was not a lonely walk, cottages being scattered about all the way. When nearing the Grange they met a party coming from it: Selina and Alice Dalrymple, the latter slightly lame, and a young lady just come on a visit to them, Mary Isabel Lynn: a thoughtful girl with a fair face, a sweet countenance, and wonderful grey-blue eyes, from which you could hardly take your own. Gerard Hope was with them: a gay-natured young fellow, who was a Government clerk in London, and liked to run down to Moat Grange for Sundays as often as he could find a decent excuse for it.

"So you *are* here!" cried Frances to him, in her off-handed manner—and perhaps the thought that he might be there had been the secret cause of her impatience to meet the Dalrymples. "What have you to say for yourself, Mr. Gerard?—after protesting and vowing yesterday that the earliest morning train would not be surer to start than you!"

"Don't know what I shall say up there," returned Mr. Hope, nodding his head in the direction of London. "When I took French leave to stay over Monday last time they told me I should some day take it once too often."

"You can put it upon the shooting, you know, Gerard," interposed Selina. "No barbarous tyrant of a red-tape martinet could expect you to go up and leave the pheasants on the First of October. Put it to him whether he could."

"And he will ask you how many pair you bagged, and look round for those you have brought for himself—see if he does not," laughed Mary Lynn.

"But Gerard is not shooting," commented Frances.

"No," said Gerard, "these girls kept me. Now, Selina, don't deny it: you know you did."

"What a story!" retorted Selina. "If ever I met your equal, Gerard! You stayed behind of your own accord. Put it upon me, if you like. I know. It was not for me you stayed."

Frances Chenevix glanced at the delicate and too conscious face of Alice Dalrymple. Mr. Gerard Hope was a general admirer: but these two girls, Frances and Alice, were both rather dear to him—one of them, however, more so than the other. Were they destined to be rivals? Frances gave Miss Margery's invitation; and it was eagerly accepted: but not by Gerard. He really had to start for town by the midday train.

"Will Miss Margery extend her invitation to Oscar, do you think?" asked Alice, in her quiet voice. "He is staying with us."

"To be sure: the more, the merrier," assented Frances. "Not that Oscar is one of my especial favourites," added the free-speaking girl. "He is too solemn for me. Why, he is graver than a judge."

They all rambled on together. Gerard Hope and Frances somehow found themselves behind the others.

"*Why* did you stay to-day?" the girl asked him, in a low tone. "After saying yesterday that it was simply impossible!"

"Could not tear myself away," he whispered back again. "For one thing, I thought I might again see *you*."

"Are you playing at two games, Gerard?" continued Frances, giving him a keen glance. In truth, she would like to know.

"I am not playing at one game yet," answered the young man. "It would not do, you know."

"What would not do? As if anybody could make top or tail of your talk when you go in for obscurity!" she added, with a light laugh, as she gave a toss to her pretty hat.

"Were I to attempt to talk in language less obscure, I should soon be set down; therefore I never—we must conclude—shall go in for it," spoke he, in a strangely earnest tone. And, with that, Mr. Hope walked forward to join the others, leaving a line of pain on the fair open brow of Lady Frances Chenevix.

CHAPTER II.

THE SHOT.

THEY had brought down the pheasants in plenty: never had a First of October afforded better spoil: and they had lingered long at the sport, for evening was drawing on. Robert Dalrymple, the

head of the party and owner of Moat Grange—which was a desolate Grange enough, to look at, with the remains of a moat around it, long since filled in—aimed at the last bird he meant to hit that day, and missed it. He handed his gun to his gamekeeper.

“Shall I load again, sir?”

“No; we have done enough for one day, Hardy: and it is getting late. Come, Robert. Oscar, are you satisfied?”

“He must be greedy if he is not,” broke in the hearty voice of the Honourable and Reverend Thomas Cleveland, the Rector of Netherleigh, who had joined the shooting party, and who was related to Lady Acorn, though very distantly: for, some twenty years ago, the Earldom of Cleveland had lapsed to a distant branch.

“You will come home and dine with us, Cleveland,” spoke Mr. Dalrymple, as they turned their faces towards the Grange.

“What, in this trim? Mrs. Dalrymple would say I made myself free and easy.”

“Nonsense! You know we don’t stand upon ceremony. James will give your boots a brush. And, if you insist on being smart, I will lend you a coat.”

“You have lent me one before now. Thank you. Then I don’t care if I do,” concluded the Rector.

He had not time to go home and change his things. The Rectory and the Grange stood a good mile apart from each other, the village lying between them—and the dinner-hour was at hand. For the hours of that period were not the fashionable ones of these, when people dine at eight o’clock. Five o’clock was thought to be the proper hour then, or six at the latest, especially with unceremonious country people. As to parsons, they wore clothes cut as other people’s were cut, only that the coats were generally black.

“Look out, Robert,” cried Mr. Cleveland to young Dalrymple. “Stand away.” And, turning round, the Rector fired his gun in the air.

“What is that for?” demanded Oscar Dalrymple, a relative of the family, and staying for a day or two at the Grange.

“I never carry home my gun loaded,” was Mr. Cleveland’s answer. “I have too many young ones to risk it; they are in all parts of the house at once, putting their hands to everything. Neither do I think it fair to carry it into the house of a friend.”

Oscar Dalrymple drew down the corners of his mouth; it gave an unpleasing expression to his face, which was naturally cold. At that moment a bird rose within range; Oscar raised his piece, fired and brought it down. “That is how I like to waste good powder and shot,” said he.

“All right, Mr. Oscar,” was the Rector’s hearty answer. “To use it is better than to waste it, but to waste it is better than to run risks. Most of the accidents that happen with guns are caused by want of precaution.”

"Shall I draw your charge, Mr. Robert?" asked Hardy; who, as a good church-going man, had a reverence for all the Rector said, in the church and out of it.

"Draw the charge from *my* gun!" retorted Hardy's young master; not, however, speaking within ear-shot of Mr. Cleveland. "No. I can take care of my playthings, if others can't, Hardy," he added, with all the self-sufficiency of a young and vain man.

Presently there came up a substantial farmer, winding across the stubble towards his own house, which they were passing. He rented under Mr. Dalrymple.

"Famous good sport to-day, hasn't it been, Squire?" cried he, saluting his landlord.

"Famous. Never better. Will you accept a pair, Lee?" continued Mr. Dalrymple. "We have bagged plenty."

The farmer gladly took the pheasants. "I shall tell my daughters you shot them on purpose, Squire," said he jestingly.

"Do," interposed Robert, with a laugh. "Tell Miss Judith I shot them for her: in return for her sewing up that rent in my coat, the other day, and making me decent to go home. Is the fence, where I fell, mended yet?"

"Mended yet!" echoed Mr. Lee. "It was up again in an hour after you left, Mr. Robert."

"Ah! I know you are the essence of order and punctuality," returned Robert. "You must let me have the cost."

"Time enough for that," said the farmer. "'Twasn't much. Good afternoon, gentlemen; your servant, Squire."

"Oh—I say—Lee," called out Robert, as the farmer was turning homewards, whilst the rest of the party pursued their way, "about the mud in that weir? Hardy says it will hurt the fish to do it now."

"That's just what I told you, Mr. Robert."

"Well, then— But I'll come down to-morrow, and talk it over with you: I can't stop now."

"As you please, sir. I shall be somewhere about."

Robert Dalrymple turned too hastily. His foot caught against something sticking out of the stubble, and in saving himself he nearly dropped his gun. He recovered the gun with a jerk, but the trigger was touched, he never knew how, or with what, and the piece went off. A cry in front, a confusion, one man down, and the others gathered round him, was all Robert Dalrymple saw, as through a mist. He dropped the gun, started forward, and gave vent to a cry of anguish. For it was his father who had fallen.

The most collected was Oscar Dalrymple. He always was collected; his nature was essentially cool and calm. Holding up Mr. Dalrymple's head and shoulders, he strove to ascertain where the injury lay. Though very pale, and lying with closed eyes, Mr. Dalrymple had not fainted.

"Oh, father," cried Robert, with a wail of grief, as he threw

himself on his knees beside him, "I did not do it purposely—I don't know how it happened."

"Purposely—no, my boy," answered his father, in a kind tone, as he opened his eyes. "Cheer up, Charley." For, in fond moments, and at other odd times, they would call the boy by his second name, Charles: Robert often clashed with his father's.

"I do not believe there's much harm done," continued the sufferer. "I think the damage is in my left leg."

Mr. Dalrymple was right. The charge had entered the calf of the left leg. Oscar cut the leg of the trouser round at the knee with a pen-knife, unbuttoned the short gaiter, and drew them off, and the boot. The blood was running freely. As a matter of course, not a soul knew what ought to be done, whether anything or nothing, all being profoundly ignorant of the simple principles of surgery, but they stumbled to the conclusion that tying it up might stop the blood.

"Not that handkerchief," interposed Mr. Cleveland, as Oscar was about to apply Mr. Dalrymple's own, a red silk one. "Take mine: it is white, and linen. The first thing will be to get him home."

"The first thing must be to get a doctor," said Oscar.

"Of course. But we can move him home while the doctor is coming."

"My house is close at hand," said Farmer Lee. "Better move him there for the present."

"No, get me home," spoke up Mr. Dalrymple.

"The Squire thinks that home's home," commented the gamekeeper. "And so it is; 'specially when one's sick."

True enough. The difficulty was, how to get Mr. Dalrymple there. But necessity, as we all know, is the true mother of invention: and by the help of a mattress, procured from the farmer's, with impromptu bearings attached to it made of "webbing," as Mr. Lee's buxom daughter called some particularly strong tape she happened to have by her, the means were organised. Some labourers, summoned by Mr. Lee, were pressed into the service; with Oscar Dalrymple, the farmer, and the gamekeeper. These started with their load. Robert, in a state of distraction, had flown off for medical assistance; Mr. Cleveland volunteered to go forward and prepare Mrs. Dalrymple.

Mrs. Dalrymple, with her daughters and their guest, Mary Lynn, sat in one of the old-fashioned rooms of the Grange, they and the dinner alike awaiting the return of the shooting party. Old-fashioned as regarded its construction, and its carved-oak panelling, dark as mahogany, but handsome withal, and opening into a larger and lighter drawing-room. Mrs. Dalrymple, an agreeable woman of three or four-and-forty, had risen, and was bending over Miss Lynn's tambour frame, telling her it was growing too dusk to see. Selina Dalrymple was at the piano, trying a piece of new music, talking and laughing at the same time, and Alice, always more or less of an invalid, lay on her reclining sofa near the window.

"Here is Mr. Cleveland," exclaimed Alice, seeing him pass "I said he would be sure to come here to dinner, mamma."

Mrs. Dalrymple raised her head, and went, in her simple hospitable fashion, to open the hall door. He followed her back to the oak parlour, and stood just within it.

"What a long day you have had!" she exclaimed. "I think you must all be tired. Where are the others?"

"They are behind," replied the clergyman. He had been determining to make light of the accident, at the first telling; quite a joke of it; so as to prevent alarm. "We have bagged such a quantity, Mrs. Dalrymple: and your husband has asked me to dinner; and is going to accommodate me with a coat as well. Oh, but, talking of bagging, and dinner, and coats, I hope you have plenty of hot water in the house; baths, and all the rest of it. One of us has hurt his leg, and we may want no end of hot water to wash it."

"That is Charley, I know," said Selina. "He is always getting into some scrape. Look at what he did at Lee's last week."

"No; it is not Charley, for once. Guess again."

"Is it Oscar?"

"Oscar!" interposed Alice, from her sofa. "Oscar is too cautious to get hurt."

"What should you say to its being me?" said Mr. Cleveland, sitting down, and stretching out one leg, as if it were stiff and he could not bend it.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Dalrymple, running forward with a foot-stool. "How did it happen? You ought not to have walked home."

"No," said he, "my leg is all right. It is Dalrymple's leg: he has hurt his a little."

"How did he do it? Is it the knee? Did he fall?" was reiterated around.

"It is nothing," interrupted Mr. Cleveland. "But we would not let him walk home. And I came on to tell you, lest you should be alarmed at seeing him brought in."

"Brought in!" echoed Mrs. Dalrymple. "How do you mean? Who is bringing him?"

"Hardy and Farmer Lee. Left to himself, he might have been for running here, leaping the ditches over the shortest cut; so we just made him lie down on a mattress, and they are carrying it. Miss Judith supplied us."

"Has he sprained his leg?"

"No," carelessly returned Mr. Cleveland. "He has managed to get a little shot into it; but ——"

"Shot!" interrupted Mrs. Dalrymple, in a frightened tone. "*Shot?*"

"It is nothing, I assure you. A very slight wound. He will be out with us in a week again."

"Oh, Mr. Cleveland!" she faintly cried. "Is it serious?"

"Serious!" laughed the well-intentioned clergyman. "My dear lady, don't you see how merry I am? The most serious part is the trousers. Oscar, taking alarm, like you, as to seriousness, decapitated their leg at the knee. They will never be fit to wear again," added Mr. Cleveland, with a grave face.

"We will turn them over to Robert's stock," said Selina. "I am sure, what with one random action or another, half his clothes are in ribands."

"How was it done?" inquired Alice.

"An accident," slightly replied Mr. Cleveland. "One never does know too well how such mishaps occur."

"We must send for a doctor," observed Mrs. Dalrymple, ringing the bell. "However slight it may be, I shall not know how to treat it."

"We thought of that, and Robert is gone for Forth," said the Rector as he turned away. In the passage he met Reuben, a staid, respectable man servant who had been in the family many years; his healthy face was ruddy as a summer apple, and his head, bald on the top, was sprinkled with powder. Mr. Cleveland told him what had happened; he then went to the back door, and stood there, looking out—his hands in the pockets of his velveteen coat. Selina came quietly up; she was trembling.

"Mr. Cleveland," she whispered, "is it not worse than you have said? I think you have been purposely making light of it. Pray tell me the truth. You know I am not excitable: I leave that to Alice."

"My dear, in one sense I made light of it, because I wished to prevent unnecessary alarm. But I assure you I do not fear it is any serious hurt."

"Was it papa's own gun that went off?"

"No."

"Whose, then?"

"Robert's."

"Oh!—but I might have known it," she added, her shocked tone giving place to one of anger. "Robert is guilty of carelessness every day of his life—of wanton recklessness."

"Robert is careless," acknowledged Mr. Cleveland. "You know, my dear, it is said to be a failing of the Dalrymples. But he has a good heart; and he is always so sorry for his faults."

"Yes, his life is made up of sinning and repenting."

"Sinning!"

"I call such carelessness sin," maintained Selina. "To think he should have shot papa!"

"My dear, you are looking at it in the worst aspect. I believe it will prove but a trifling injury. But, to see him borne here on a mattress, minus the leg of his pantaloons, and his own leg bandaged, might have frightened some of you into fits. You go back to the

oak parlour, Selina; and don't let Alice run out of it at the first slight sound she may chance to hear."

Selina did as she was told: Mr. Cleveland stayed where he was. Very soon he distinguished the steady tread of feet approaching; and at the same time he saw, to his surprise, the gig of the surgeon turning off from the road. How quick Robert had been!

Quick indeed! Robert, as it proved, had met the surgeon's gig, himself and Dr. Tyler in it, a physician from the nearest town. They had been together to a consultation. Robert, light and slim, had got into the gig between them. He was now the first to get out; and he began rushing about like a madman. The clergyman went forth and laid hands upon him.

"You will do more harm than you have already done, young sir, unless you can control yourself. Here have I been at the pains of impressing upon your mother and sisters that it is nothing more than a flea-bite, and you are going to upset it all! Be calm before them, at any rate."

"Oh, Mr. Cleveland! You talk of calmness! Perhaps I have killed my father."

"I hope not. But I daresay a great deal depends on his being kept quiet and tranquil. Remember that. If you cannot," added Mr. Cleveland, walking him forward a few paces, "I will just march you over to the Rectory, and keep you there until all fear of danger is over."

Robert pulled his senses together with an effort. "I will be calm; I promise you. Repentance," he continued bitterly, "will do *him* no good, so I had better keep it to myself. I wish I had shot off my own head first!"

"There you begin again! *Will* you be quiet?"

"Yes, I will. I'll go and stamp about where nobody can see me, and get rid of myself in that way."

He escaped from Mr. Cleveland, made his way to the kitchen garden, and began striding about amid the autumn cabbages. Poor Robert! he really felt as though it would be a mercy if his head were off. He was good-hearted, generous, and affectionate, but thoughtless and impulsive.

As the gamekeeper was departing, after helping to carry the mattress upstairs, he caught sight of his young master's restless movements, and went to him.

"Ah, Mr. Robert, it's bad enough, but racing about won't do no good. If you had but let me draw that there charge! Mr. Cleveland's ideas is sure to be right: the earl's always was, afore him."

Robert went on "racing" about worse than before, clearing a dozen cabbages at a stride. "How did my father bear the transport home, Hardy?"

"Pretty well. A bit faintish he got."

"Hardy, I will *never* touch a gun again."

"I don't suppose you will, Mr. Robert—not till the next time. You may touch 'em, sir, but you must be more careful of 'em."

Robert groaned.

"This is the second accident of just the same sort that I have been in," continued Hardy. "The other was at the earl's, when I was a youngster. Not Mr. Cleveland's father, you know, sir; t'other earl afore him, over at t'other place. Two red-coat blades had come down there for a week's sport, and one of 'em (he seemed to us keepers as if he had never handled a gun in all his born days) got the shot into the other's calf—just as it has been got this evening into the squire's. That was a worse accident, though, than this will be, I hope. He was laid up at the inn, close by where it happened, for six weeks, for they thought it best not to carry him to the Hall, and then——"

"And then—did it terminate fatally?" interrupted Robert, scarcely above his breath.

"Law, no, sir! At the end of the six weeks he was on his legs, as strong as ever, and went back to London—or wherever it was he came from."

Robert Dalrymple drew a relieved breath. "I shall go in and hear what the surgeons say," said he, restlessly. "And you go round to the kitchen, Hardy, and tell them to give you some tea; or anything else you'd like."

Miss Lynn was in the oak parlour alone, standing before the fire, when Robert entered.

"Oh, Robert," she said, "I wanted to see you. Do you fear this will be very bad?—very serious?"

"I don't know," was the desponding answer.

"Whose gun was it that did the mischief?"

"Whose gun! Have you not heard?" he broke forth, in a tone of fierce self-reproach. "MINE, of course. And if he dies, I shall have murdered him."

Mary Lynn was used to Robert's heroics; but she looked terribly grieved now.

"I see what you think, Mary," he said, in the mood to view all things in a gloomy light: "that you will be better without me than with me. Cancel our engagement, if you will. I cannot say that I do not deserve it."

"No, Robert, I was not thinking of that," she answered. Tears had risen to her eyes, glistening in the fire light. "I was wondering whether I could say or do anything to induce you to be less thoughtless; less ——"

"Less like a fool. Say it out, Mary."

"You are anything but that, and you know it. Only you will act so much upon impulse. You think, speak, move, and act without the slightest deliberation or forethought. It is all random impulse."

"Impulse could hardly have been at fault here, Mary. It was a horrible accident, and I shall deplore it to the last hour of my life."

"How did it happen?"

"I cannot tell. I had been speaking with Lee, gun in hand, and was turning short round to catch up the others, when the gun went off. Possibly the trigger caught my coat sleeve—I cannot tell. Yes, that was pure accident, Mary: but there's something worse connected with it."

"What do you mean?"

"Mr. Cleveland had just before fired off his gun because he would not bring it indoors, loaded. Hardy asked if he should draw the charge from mine, and I answered him, mockingly, that I could take good care of it. Why did I not let him do it?" added the young man beginning to stride the room in his remorse as he had previously been striding the bed of cabbages. "What an idiot I was!—a wicked, self-sufficient imbecile! You had better give me up at once, Mary."

She turned and glanced at him with a smile. It brought him back to her side, and he laid his hands on her shoulders and looked into her eyes by the light of the fire.

"It may be to your interest," he whispered in agitation. "Some day I may be shooting you, in one of my careless moods. What do you say, Mary?"

She said nothing. She only leaned slightly forward and smiled. Robert threw his arms around her, and strained her to him in all the fervency of a first affection. "My darling, my darling! Mary, you are too good for me."

They were nice looking young people, both of them, and in love with one another. Robert was three-and-twenty; she only nineteen; and the world looked fair before them. But, that she was too good for him, was a greater truth than Mr. Robert thought.

Stir was heard in the house now; the medical men were coming downstairs. Their report was favourable. The bleeding had been stopped, the shots extracted, and there was no appearance of danger. A little confinement, perfect quiet and proper treatment, would, they hoped, soon set all to rights again.

Dinner had not been thought of. When the cook had nearly succumbed to despair, and Mr. Dalrymple had dropped into a calm sleep, and the anxious ones were gathered together in the oak parlour, Reuben came in, and said the soup was on the table.

"Then I will wish you all a good appetite, and be gone," said the Rector to Mrs. Dalrymple.

"Indeed you will not go without some dinner."

"I am in a pretty state for dinner," said he, "and I can't worry Dalrymple over coats now. Look at me."

"Oh, Mr. Cleveland! do you think we shall regard your coat! Is this a time to be fastidious? We are not much dressed ourselves."

"No?" said the Rector, regarding them. "I am sure you all look well. You are not in shooting jackets and gaiters and inch-thick boots."

"I am going to sit down as I am," interrupted Robert, who had not changed a thing since he came in. "A fellow with a dreadful care at his heart has not the pluck to put on a dandy-cut coat."

Mrs. Dalrymple ended the matter by taking the Rector's arm and bearing him off to the dining-room. The rest followed. Oscar met them in the hall—dressed. He was a small, spare man, cool and self-contained in all emergencies, and fastidious in his habits, even to the putting on of proper coats. His colourless face was rather unpleasing at times, though its features were good, the eyes cold and light, the drawn-in lips thin. Catching Selina's hand, he took her in.

It was a lively dinner table, after all. Hope had arisen in every heart, and Mr. Cleveland was at his merriest. He had great faith in cheerful looks round a sick-bed, and he did not want desponding ones to be displayed to his friend, Dalrymple.

Before the meal was over, a carriage was heard to approach the house. It contained Miss Upton. The news of the accident had spread; it had reached Court Netherleigh; and Miss Upton got up from her own dinner table and ordered her carriage. She came in, all concern, penetrating to the midst of them in her unceremonious way.

"And the fault was *Robert's*!" she exclaimed, after listening to the recital, as she turned her condemning eyes upon the culprit. "I am sorry to hear *that*."

"You cannot blame me as I blame myself, Miss Upton," he said, ingenuously, a moisture dimming his eyes. "I am always doing wrong; I know that. But this time it was really an accident that might have happened to anyone. Even to Oscar, with all his prudence."

"I beg your pardon, young man; you are wrong there," returned Miss Upton. "Oscar Dalrymple would have taken care to hold his gun so that it *could not* go off unawares. Never you fear that he will shoot anybody. I hope and trust your father will get well, Robert Dalrymple; and I hope you will let this be a lesson to you."

"I mean it to be one," humbly answered Robert.

Miss Upton carried the three young ladies back to Court Netherleigh, leaving Oscar and Robert to follow on foot: no reason why they should not go, she answered, and it would serve to keep the house quiet for its master.

"Will it prove of serious consequence, this hurt?" she took an opportunity of asking aside of Mr. Cleveland, as she was going out to the carriage.

"No, I hope not. I think not. It is only a few stray shots in the leg."

"I don't like those stray shots in the leg, mind you," returned Miss Upton.

"Neither do I, in a general way," confessed the Rector.

Thinking of this, thinking of that, Miss Upton was silent during the drive home. But it never did, or could, enter into her imagination to suppose that the fair girl, with the sweet and thoughtful grey-

blue eyes, sitting opposite her—eyes that somehow did not seem altogether unfamiliar to her memory—was the daughter of that friend of her girlhood, Catherine Grant.

CHAPTER III.

LEFT TO ROBERT.

THE eighth day after the accident to Mr. Dalrymple was a day of rejoicing, for he was so far recovered as to be up for some hours. A sofa was drawn before the fire, and he lay on it. The symptoms had all along been favourable, and he now merrily told them that if anybody had written to order him a cork leg, he thought it might be countermanded. Mr. Cleveland, a frequent visitor, privately decided that the thanksgiving for his recovery might be offered up in church on the following Sunday—such being the custom in the good and simple place. They all rejoiced with him, paying his chamber visits by turns. Alice and Miss Lynn had been in together during the afternoon: when they were leaving, he beckoned the latter back, but Alice did not notice, and went limping from the room. Any great trouble affected her spirits sadly, and her lameness would then be more conspicuous.

"Do you want me to do anything for you?" asked Mary, returning, and bending over the sofa.

"Yes," said Mr. Dalrymple, taking possession of both her hands, and looking up with an arch smile, "I want you to tell me what the secret is between you and that graceless Robert."

Mary Lynn's eyes drooped, and her face grew scarlet. She was unable to speak.

"*Won't* you tell me?" repeated Mr. Dalrymple.

"Has he been—saying anything to you, sir?" she faltered.

"Not he. Not a word. Somebody else told me they saw he and Miss Lynn had a secret between them, which might possibly bear results some day."

She burst into tears, got one of her hands free, and held it before her face.

"Nay, my dear," he kindly said, "I did not wish to make you uncomfortable; quite the contrary. I want just to say one thing, child: that if you and he are wishing to talk secrets to one another, I and my wife will not say nay to it: and from a word your mother dropped to me the last time I was in town, I don't think she would, either. Dry up your tears, Mary; it is a laughing matter, not a crying one. Robert is frightfully random at times, but he is good as gold at heart. I invite you and him to drink tea with me this evening. There."

Mary escaped, half smiles, half tears. And she and Robert had tea with Mr. Dalrymple that evening. He took it early since his

illness ; six o'clock. Mary made the tea, and he waited on his father, who was then in bed. When the tea was cleared away, Mary went with it ; Robert remained.

"This might have been an unlucky shot, Charley," Mr. Dalrymple suddenly observed,

"Oh, father ! do not talk about it. I am so thankful !"

"But I am going to talk about it. To tell you why it would have been so unlucky, had it turned out differently. This accident has made me remember the uncertainty of life, if I never remembered it before. Put the candles off the table ; I don't like them right in my eyes ; and bring a chair here to the bedside. Get the lotion before you sit down."

Robert did what was required, and took his seat.

"When I married, Robert, I was only the second brother, and no settlement was made on your mother : I had nothing to settle. The post I had in London in what you young people are now pleased to call the red-tape office, brought me in six hundred a year, and we married on that, to rub on as we best could. And I daresay we should have rubbed on very well," added Mr. Dalrymple, in a sort of parenthesis, "for our desires were simple, and we were not likely to go beyond our income. However, when you were about two years old, Moat Grange fell to me, through the death of my elder brother."

"What was the cause of his death ?" interrupted Robert. "He must have been a young man."

"Eight-and-twenty only. It was young. I gave up my post in town and we came to Moat Grange —"

"But what did Uncle Claude die of ?" asked Robert again. "I don't remember to have heard."

"Never mind what. It was an unhappy death, and we have not cared to speak of it. Moat Grange is worth about two thousand a year : and we have been doing wrong, in one respect, ever since we came to it, for we have put nothing by."

"Why should you have put by, father ?"

"There ! That is an exemplification of your random way of speaking and thinking. Moat Grange is entailed upon you, every shilling of it."

"Well, it will be enough for me—with what I have," said Robert.

"I hope it will. But it would have been anything but well had I died ; for, in that case your mother and sisters would have been beggars."

"Oh, father !"

"Yes ; all would have lapsed to you. Let me go on. Claude Dalrymple left many debts behind him, some of them cruel ones, personal ones—we will not enter into that. I—moved by a chivalrous feeling perhaps, but which I and your mother have never repented of—took those personal debts upon me, and paid them off by degrees."

"I should have done the same," cried impulsive Robert.

"And the estate had of course to be kept up, for I would not have it said that Moat Grange suffered by its change of owners, and your mother thought with me; so that altogether we had a struggle for it, and were positively less at our ease for ready money here than we had been in our little household in London. When the debts were cleared off, and we had breathing time, I began to think of saving: but I am sorry to say it was only thought of; not done. The cost of educating you children increased as you grew older; Alice's illness came on and was a great and continued expense; and, what with one thing and another, we never did, or have, put by. Your expenses at college were enormous."

"Were they," returned Robert, indifferently.

"Were they!" echoed Mr. Dalrymple, almost in a sharp tone. "Do you forget that you also ran into debt there, like your Uncle Claude?"

"Not much, was it, sir?" cried Robert deprecatingly, who remembered very little about the matter, beyond the fact that the bills had gone in to Moat Grange.

"Pretty well," returned Mr. Dalrymple, with a cough. "The sum total averaged between six and seven hundred a year, for every year that you were there."

"Surely not!" uttered Robert, startled to contrition.

"It seems to have made but little impression on you; you knew it at the time. But I am not recalling this, to cast reproach on you now, Robert: I only wanted to explain how it is that we have been unable to put by. Not a day after I am well will I delay beginning it. We will curtail our expenses, even in things hitherto considered necessary, no matter what the neighbourhood may think; and I shall probably insure my life. Your mother and I were talking of this all day yesterday."

"I can do with less than I spend, father; I will make the half of it do," said Robert, in one of his fits of impulse.

"We shall see that," said Mr. Dalrymple, with another cough. "But you do not know the trouble this has been to me since the accident, Robert. I have lain here, and dwelt incessantly upon the helpless condition of your mother and sisters—left helpless on your hands—should I be called away."

"My dear father, it need not trouble you. Do you suppose I should ever wish to disturb my mother and sisters in the possession of their home? What do you take me for?"

"Ah, Robert, these generous resolves are easily made; but circumstances more often than not mar them. You will be wanting a home of your own—and a wife."

Robert's face took a very conscious look. "Time enough for that, sir."

"If you and Mary Lynn can both think so."

"You—don't—object to her, do you, sir?" came the deprecating question.

"No, indeed I don't object to her: except on one score," replied Mr. Dalrymple. "That she is too good for you."

Robert laughed. "I told her that myself, and asked her to give me up. It was the night of the accident, when I was so truly miserable."

"Well, Robert, you could not have chosen a better girl than Mary Lynn. She will have money——"

"I'm sure I have not thought whether she will or not," interrupted Robert, quite indignantly.

"Of course not; I should be surprised if you had," said Mr. Dalrymple, in the satirical tone his son disliked. "Common-place ways and means, pounds, shillings, and pence, are beneath the exalted consideration of young Mr. Dalrymple. I should not wonder but you would set up to live upon air to-morrow, if you had nothing else to live upon."

"Well, father, you know what I meant—that I am not mercenary."

"I should be sorry if you were. But when we contemplate the prospect of a separate household, it is sometimes necessary to consider how its bread-and-cheese will be provided."

"I have the two hundred a year that my own property brings in—that Aunt Cecily left me; there's that to begin with."

"And I will allow you three or four hundred more; Mary will bring something and be well-off later. Yes, Robert, I think you may set up your tent if you will. I like young men to marry young. I did myself—at three-and-twenty: your present age. Your Uncle Claude did not, and ran into folly. And, Robert, I should advise you to begin and read for the Bar. Better have a profession."

"I did begin, you know, father."

"And came down here when you were ill with that fever, and never went up again. Moat Grange will be yours eventually——"

"Not for these twenty years, I hope, father," impulsively interrupted Robert. "You are spared to us, and I can never be sufficiently thankful for it. Why, in twenty years you would not be an old man; not seventy."

"I am thankful, too, Robert; thankful that my life is not cut off in its midst—as it might have been. The future of your mother and sisters has been a thorn in my side since I was brought face to face with death. In health we are apt to be fearfully careless."

"Hear me, father," cried Robert, rising, and speaking with emotion. "Had the worst happened, they should have been my first care: I declare it to you. First and foremost, even before Mary Lynn."

"My boy, I know your heart. Are you going down? That's right. I think I have talked enough. Bring a light here first. My leg is very uneasy."

"Does it pain you," inquired Robert, who had noticed that his father was getting restless. "How tight the bandage is! The leg appears to be swollen."

"The effect of the bandage being tight," remarked Mr. Dalrymple. "Loosen it, and put plenty of lotion on."

"It feels very hot," were Robert's last words.

The evening went on. Just before bed time, the young people were all sitting round the fire in the oak parlour, Mrs. Dalrymple being with her husband. So assured did they now feel of no ill results ensuing, that they had got to speak lightly of it—not of the accident: none would have been capable of that—but of the circumstances attending it. Selina had just been recommending Robert never in future to touch any weapon stronger than a popgun.

"I don't mean to," said Robert.

"What a long conference you had with papa to-night, after Mary came down," went on Selina. "What was it about, Robert? Were you getting a lesson how to carry loaded guns?"

"Not that," put in Oscar Dalrymple. "Robert has learnt that lesson by heart. He was getting some hints how to manage Moat Grange."

Robert looked up quickly, almost believing Oscar must have been behind the chamber wall.

"Your father has come so very near to losing it," added Oscar. "A chance like that brings reflection."

"Only to think of it!" breathed Alice—"that we have been so near losing the Grange! If dear papa had died it would have come to Robert."

"Ay, all Robert's; neither yours nor your mother's," mused Oscar. "I daresay the thought has worried Mr. Dalrymple."

"I know it has," said Robert, in his hasty way. "But there was no occasion for it."

"No, thank Heaven!" breathed Selina.

"However things had turned out, my father might have been easy on that score. And we were talking of you," added Robert, in a whisper, to Mary Lynn, while making believe to regard attentively the sofa cushion at her ear. "And of setting up our tent, Mary; and of ways and means—and I am to go on reading for the Bar. It all looks couleur de rose."

"Robert," returned Alice, "should you have sent us adrift, had you come into the old homestead?"

"To be sure I should, in double-quick time," answered he, tilting Alice's chair back to kiss her, and keeping it in that position. "'Sharp the word and quick the motion' it would have been with me then. I should have paid a premium with you both and shipped you off by an emigrant ship to some old Turkish Sultan who buys wives, so that you might never trouble me or the Grange again."

"And mamma, Robert?"

"Oh, mamma—I *might*, perhaps, have allowed her to stop here," conceded Robert, with a mock serious face. "On condition that she acted as my housekeeper."

They all laughed: they were secure in the love of Robert. In the

midst of which, the young man felt somebody touch his shoulder. It was Mrs. Dalrymple.

"Dearest mamma," said he, letting Alice and her chair go forward to their natural position, and stepping backwards, laughing still. "Did you hear what we were saying?"

"Yes, Robert, I heard it," she sighed. "Have you a mind for a drive to-night?"

"A drive!" exclaimed Robert. "To find the emigrant ship?"

"I have told James to get the gig ready. He can go, if you do not, but I thought you might be the quicker driver. It is to bring Mr. Forth. Some change for the worse has taken place in your father."

All their mirth was forgotten instantly. They sat speechless.

"He complained, just now, of the bandage being too tight, and said Robert had pretended to loosen it, but must have only fancied that he did so," continued Mrs. Dalrymple, speaking to them generally. "It is much inflamed and swollen, and he cannot bear the pain. I fear," she added, sitting down and bursting into tears, "that we have reckoned on his recovery too soon—that it is far off yet."

Robert flew on the wings of the wind, and soon brought back Mr. Forth. Mrs. Dalrymple and Oscar went with the surgeon to the sick chamber. Uncovering the leg, he held the wax light close to examine it. One look, and he glanced up with a too expressive face.

Oscar, always observant, noticed it; nobody else. Mrs. Dalrymple asked the cause of the change, the sudden heat and pain.

"It is a change—that—does—sometimes come on," drawled Mr. Forth, who of course, as a medical man, would have protested against danger had he known his patient was going to drop out of his hands the next moment but one.

"That redness about it," said Mr. Dalrymple, "that's new."

"A touch of erysipelas," remarked the surgeon.

His manner soothed them, and the vague feeling of alarm subsided. None of them looked to the worst side—and a day or two passed on. Dr. Tyler came again now as well as Mr. Forth.

One morning when the doctors were driving out of the stable-yard—that way was more convenient to the high road than the front entrance—they met Mr. Cleveland. Mr. Forth pulled up, and the Rector leaned on the gig while he talked to them, one hand on the wing, the other on the dash-board.

"How is he this morning?"

"We were speaking of you, sir," replied Mr. Forth: "saying that you, as Mr. Dalrymple's chief friend, would be the best to break the news at the Grange. There is no hope."

"No hope of his life?"

"None. A day or two must terminate it."

Mr. Cleveland was inexpressibly shocked. He could not at first speak. "This is very sudden, gentlemen."

"Not particularly so. At least, not to us. We have done all in our power, but it has mastered us. Will you break it to him?"

"Yes," he answered, quitting them. "It is a hard task; but somebody must do it." And he went straight to Mr. Dalrymple.

In the evening, Robert, who had been away all day on some matter of business, returned. As he went to his father's room to report what he had done, his mother came out of it. She had her handkerchief to her face: Robert supposed she was afraid of draughts. He approached the bed.

Mr. Dalrymple, looking flushed and restless, took Robert's hand and held it in his. "Have they told you the news, my boy?"

"No," answered Robert, never thinking of the true meaning of the words. "Is there any?"

Robert Dalrymple the elder gazed at him; a yearning gaze. And an uneasy sensation stole over his son.

"I am going to leave you, Robert."

He understood, and sank down by the side of the bed. It was as if a thunderbolt had struck him: and one that would leave its trace throughout life.

"Father! It cannot be!"

"In a day or two, Robert. That is all of time they can promise me now."

He cried out with a low, wailing cry, and let his head drop on the counterpane beside his father.

"You must not take it too much to heart, my son. Remember: that is one of my dying injunctions."

"I wish I could die for you, father!" he passionately uttered. "I shall never forgive myself."

"I forgive you heartily and freely, Robert. My boy, see you not that this must be God's good will. I could die in peace but for the thought of your mother and sisters. I can but leave them to you: will you take care of and cherish them?"

He lifted his head, speaking eagerly. "I will, I will. They shall be my only care. Father, this shall ever be their home. I swear——"

"Be silent, Robert!" interrupted Mr. Dalrymple, his voice raised in emotion. "How dare you? *Never take a rash oath.*"

"I mean to fulfil it, father; just as though I had taken it. This shall ever be my mother's home. But, oh, to lose you thus! My father, say once more that you do forgive me. Oh, father, forgive and bless me before you die!"

Death came, all too surely; and the neighbourhood, struck with consternation, grieved sincerely for Mr. Dalrymple.

"If Mr. Robert had but let me draw that charge from his gun, the Squire would have been here now," bewailed Hardy the gamekeeper.

(*To be continued.*)

WRITE SOON.

"Write soon, my dearest!" In the tender gloaming,
While flowers are closing, tremulous and low,
Fall the dear words, and his brown fingers roaming
O'er the young cheek where girlhood's roses blow,
Steal from a wealth of golden sun-kissed tresses
A ribbon blue as are the summer skies:

"Write soon," she murmurs 'neath his fond caresses,
And tears are trembling in her downcast eyes.

"Write soon, my love! for life will be so weary,
Counting the hours when thou art here no more—
Watching the road so silent, grey, and dreary—
Weaving vague pictures of that distant shore
Where thou art wandering, restless, sad, and lonely,
Waiting for tidings o'er the mighty deep:
Write soon, my love! in that dark hour, if only
One line, to soothe me while I wait and weep."

"Write soon, my darling!" Oft in accents broken
These words are whispered in the careless ear—
Mingled with tears, in hurried moments spoken,
Breathing a world of loving hope and fear.
Mother and son in the first grief of parting,
He, in the glory of his manhood's noon,
Checks the weak tears that to his eyes are starting,
While she is pleading, "Oh, write soon! write soon!"

"Write soon, my boy! think of thy mother yearning
And fondly hoping for one word from thee,
To say thy heart, unchanged, is ever turning
From the world's flattery, to home and me.
Think of thy mother's cot, when fairer places
Unfold their beauties to thy wondering eyes—
Write soon, my boy! and say if dear home faces
Smile through thy brightest dreams 'neath alien skies?"

* * * * *

When night descends on the red field of battle,
Veiling the slain—a pale and sickening sight—
When swords are sheathed and cannons cease to rattle,
Stern faces quiver in the camp-fires' light;
They read aloud a crumpled, blood-stained letter,
Scrawled by the light of the uncertain moon:
"I have been wounded, but shall soon be better;
Fond love to all—and, oh! write soon! write soon!"

Write soon! write soon! loved faces, worn with sorrow,
Bend, white and tearful, o'er a lock of hair;
Hoping, in vain, that rose-hued dawn, to-morrow,
May bring an answer to their fervent prayer.
Through every land these simple words are ringing—
Who hath not joined this universal tune?
Till time shall cease, some soft low voice is singing:
"Write soon, my dearest! Oh! write soon! write soon!"

FANNY FORRESTER.

THE STORY OF DOROTHY GRAPE.

ACCORDING to Mrs. Todhetley's belief, some people are born to be unlucky. Not only individuals, but whole families. "I have noticed it times and again, Johnny, in going through life," she has said to me: "ill luck in some way lies upon them, and upon all they do; they *cannot* prosper, from their cradle to their grave." That there will be some compensating happiness for these people hereafter—for they do exist—is a belief we all like to cherish.

I am now going to tell of people in rather humble life whom this ill-luck seemed to attend. *That* might never have brought the family into notice, ups and downs being so common in the world: but two mysterious disappearances occurred in it, which caused them to be talked of; and those occurrences I must relate before coming to Dorothy's proper history. They took place before my time; in fact when Squire Todhetley was a young man, and it is from him that I repeat it.

At this end of the village of Islip, going into it from Crabb, there stood on the right hand side of the road a superior cottage residence, with lovely yellow roses intertwining themselves about its porch. Robert Grape and his wife lived in it, who were well enough to do. He was in the "post-horse duty," the Squire said—whatever that might mean—and she had money on her own account. The cottage was hers absolutely, and nearly one hundred a year income. The latter, however, was only an annuity and would die with her.

There were two children living: Dorothy, softened by her friends into Dolly; and Thomas. Two others, who came between them, went off in what Mrs. Grape used to call a "galloping consumption." Dolly's cheeks were bright and her eyes blue, and her soft brown hair fell back in curls from her dimpled face. All the young men about, including the Squire, admired the little girl; more than their mothers did, who said she was growing up vain and light-headed. Perhaps she might be; but she was a modest, well-behaved little maiden. She went to school by day, as did her brother.

Mr. Grape's occupation, connected with the "post-horse duty," appeared to consist of driving about the country in a gig. These journeys used to take about three weeks; when he would come home for a short interval, and go off again.

One Monday morning in summer, when the sun was shining on the yellow roses and the dew glittered on the grass, Robert Grape was about to start on one of these journeys. Passing out to his gig, which waited at the gate, he stopped to pluck a rose. Dolly followed him out. She was sixteen now and had left school.

"Take care your old horse does not fall this time, father," spoke she, gaily and lightly.

"I'll take care, lass : if I can," he answered.

"The truth is, Robert, you want a new horse," said Mrs. Grape, speaking from the open door.

"I know I do, Mary Ann. Old Jack's no longer to be trusted."

"Shall you be at Bridgenorth to-morrow?"

"No ; on Wednesday evening. Good-bye once more. You may expect me home at the time I've said." And, with those last words he got into his gig and drove away.

From that day, from that hour, Robert Grape was never more seen by his family. Neither did they hear from him : but he did not, as a rule, write to them when on his journeys. They said to one another what delightful weather he was having this time, and the days passed pleasantly until the Saturday of his expected return.

But he did not come. Mrs. Grape had prepared a favourite dinner of his for the Sunday, lamb and peas, and a lemon cheesecake. They had to eat it without him. Three or four more days passed and still they saw nothing of him. Mrs. Grape was not at all uneasy.

"I think, children, he must have been mistaken in a week," she said to Dolly and Tom. "It must be next Saturday that he meant. I shall expect him then."

He did not come. And the following week Mrs. Grape wrote a letter to the inn at Bridgenorth, where he was in the habit of putting-up, asking when he had left it, and for what town.

Startling tidings came in answer. Mr. Grape had left the place nearly four weeks ago, leaving his horse and gig at the inn. He had not yet returned for them. Mrs. Grape could not make it out ; she went off to Worcester to take the stage coach for Bridgenorth, and there made enquiries.

On Wednesday evening, the next day but one after leaving his home, Mr. Grape approached Bridgenorth. Upon entering the town, the horse started and fell : his master was thrown out of the gig, but not hurt ; the shafts were broken and the horse lamed. "A pretty kettle of fish, this is," cried Mr. Grape in his good-humoured way to the ostler, when the damaged cavalcade reached the inn : "I shall have to take a week's holiday now, I suppose." The man's answer was to the effect that the old horse was no longer of much good ; Mr. Grape nodded assent, and remarked that he must be upon the look-out for another.

In the morning, he quitted the inn on foot, leaving the horse to the care of the veterinary surgeon, who said it would be four or five days before he would be fit to travel, and the gig to have its shafts repaired. Mr. Grape observed to the landlord that he should take the opportunity to go on a little expedition, which otherwise he could not have found time for, and should be back before the horse was well. But he never had come back. This was recounted to Mrs. Grape.

"He did not give any clue as to where he was going," added the

landlord ; "he started away with nothing but his umbrella and what he might have put in his pockets, saying he should walk the first stage of his journey. His portmanteau is up in his bed-room now."

All this sounded very curious to Mrs. Grape. It was unlike her open, out-speaking husband. She enquired whether it was likely that he had been injured in the fall from the gig and be lying ill somewhere.

The landlord shook his head. "He said he was not hurt a bit," replied he, "and he did not seem to be. He eat a good supper that night and made a famous breakfast in the morning."

An idea flashed across Mrs. Grape's mind as she listened. "I think he must have gone off for a ramble amidst the Welsh mountains. He was always saying how much he should like to go there."

"May be so," assented the landlord. "Them Welsh mountains be pleasant to look upon ; but if a mist comes on, or one meets with an awk'ard pass, or anything o' that—well, ma'am, let's hope we shall see him back yet."

Mrs. Grape went home in miserable uncertainty. She did not give up hope ; she thought he must be lying ill amongst the mountains, perhaps had caught a fever and lost his senses. As the days and the weeks passed on, there set in a kind of nervous expectancy. Tidings of him might come to her any day, living or dead. A sudden knock at the door made her jump ; if the postman by some rare chance paid them a visit—for letters were not written in those days by the bushel—it set her trembling. More than once she had hastily risen in the middle of the night, believing she heard a voice calling to her outside the cottage. But tidings never came.

That was disappearance the first.

In the spring of the following year Mrs. Grape sold her pretty homestead and removed to Worcester. Circumstances had changed. Beyond what little means had been, or could be, saved, the children would have nothing to help them on in the world. Tom, thirteen years old now, must have a twelvemonth's good schooling before being placed at some business. Dolly must learn a trade by which to get her living. In those days, young people who were not specially educated for it, or of humble birth, did not dream of making themselves into governesses.

"You had better go to the mantua-making, Dolly," said Mrs. Grape. "It's nice, genteel work."

Dolly drew a wry face. "I should not make much hand at that, mother."

"But what else is there ? You'd not like the stay-making ——"

"Oh dear, no."

"Or to serve in a pastry-cook's shop, or that. I should not like to see you in a shop, myself ; you are too—too giddy," added Mrs. Grape, pulling herself up from saying too pretty. "I think it must be

the mantua-making, Dolly : you'll make a good enough hand at it, once you've learnt it. Why not ?”

The house rented by Mrs. Grape at Worcester was near the London road. It was semi-detached, and built, like its fellow, in rather a peculiar way, as though the architect found himself cramped for space in width but had plenty of it in depth. It was close to the road, about a yard only of garden ground lying between. The front door opened into the sitting-room ; not a very uncommon case then with houses of its class. It was a fair-sized room, light and pretty, the window being beside the door. Another door, opposite the window, led to the rest of the house : a small back parlour, a kitchen, three rooms above stairs, with a yard and strip of garden at the back. It was a comfortable house, at a small rent ; and, once Mrs. Grape had disposed her tasty furniture about it to advantage, she tried to feel at home and to put aside her longing to be back under the old roof at Islip.

In the adjoining house dwelt two quaker ladies named Deavor, an aunt and niece, the latter a year or two older than Dolly. They showed themselves very friendly to the new comers, and the two families became intimate neighbours.

Dolly, seventeen now, was placed with Miss Pedley, one of the first dressmakers in the city, as out-door apprentice. She was bound to her for three years, and went to and fro daily. Tom was day-scholar at a gentleman's school in the neighbourhood.

One Saturday evening, when they had been about three months in their new abode, Mrs. Grape was sitting at the table in the front-room, making up a cap for herself ; Tom sat by her, doing his lessons ; Dolly was near the open window, nursing a grey kitten. Tom looked as hot as the evening, as he turned over the books before him with a puzzled face. He was a good-looking boy, with soft brown eyes and a complexion as brilliant as his sister's.

“ I say, mother,” cried he, “ I don't think this Latin will be of much good to me. I shan't make any hand at it.”

“ You will be like me then, Tom, for I'm sure I shall never make much of a hand at dressmaking,” spoke up Dolly. “ Miss Pedley sees it too.”

“ Be quiet, Dolly ; don't talk nonsense,” said Mrs. Grape. “ Let Tom finish his tasks.”

Thus reprimanded, silence supervened again. It grew dusk ; candles were lighted and the window was shut down, as the breeze whiffed their flame ; but the bright moonlight still streamed in. Presently Dolly left the room to give the kitten its supper of milk. Tom shut up his books with a bang.

“ Finished, Tom ? ”

“ Yes, mother.”

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"Finished, Tom ?"

"Yes, mother."

He was putting them away when a knock came to the front door. Tom opened it.

"Halloa, Bill!" said he.

"Halloa, Tom!" responded a boy's voice. "I say, Tom, I'm come up to ask if you'll go fishing with me to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" echoed Tom in surprise. "Why, to-morrow's Sunday!"

"Bother! I mean Monday. I'm going up to the Weir at Powick: there's first-rate fishing there. Will you come, Tom Grape?"

Mrs. Grape wondered who the boy was; she knew the voices of some of Tom's schoolfellows, but did not recognise this one. Tom, standing on the low step outside, had partly drawn to the door behind him, and she could not see out; but she heard every word as plainly as though the speakers had been in the room.

"I should like to go, but I'm sure I could never get leave from school," said Tom. "Why, the midsummer examination comes on the end of next week; our masters just do keep us to it!"

"Stingy old misers! You might take French leave, Tom."

"Mother would never let me do that," returned Tom; and he probably made a sign to indicate that his mother was within hearing, as both voices dropped to a lower key; but Mrs. Grape still heard distinctly. "Are you going to take French leave yourself, Bill?" added young Grape. "How else shall you manage to get off?"

"Oh, Monday will be holiday with us; it's a Saint's Day. Look here, Tom; you may as well come. Fishing, up at Powick, is rare fun; and I've got some prime bait."

"I can't," pleaded Tom: "no good thinking about it. You must get one of your own fellows instead."

"Suppose I must. Well, good night."

"Good night, Bill."

"I touch you last," added the strange voice. There was a shriek of laughter, the door banged back, Tom's hand came in to snatch up his cap, which lay on a table near, and he went flying after the other.

They had entered upon the fascinating game of "Titch-touch-last." Mrs. Grape got up, laid her finished cap upon the table, shook the odds and ends of threads from her black gown, and began to put her needles and cotton in the little work-box. While she was doing this, Dolly came in from the kitchen. She looked round the room.

"Why, where's Tom, mother?"

"Some boy called to speak to him, and they are running about the road at Titch-touch-last. The cap looks nice, does it not, Dolly?"

"Oh very," assented Dolly. It was one she had netted.

The voices of the boys were still heard, but at a distance. Dolly went to the door, and looked out.

"Yes, there the two are," she cried. "What boy is it, mother?"

"I don't know," replied Mrs. Grape. "I did not see him, or recognise his voice. Tom called him 'Bill.'"

She went also to the door as she spoke, and stood by her daughter on the low broad step. The voices were fainter now, for the lads, in

their play, were drawing further off and nearer to the town. Mrs. Grape could see them dodging around each other, now on this side the road, now on that. It was a remarkably light night, the moon, in the unclouded sky, almost dazzlingly bright.

"They'll make themselves very hot," she remarked, as she and Dolly withdrew indoors. "What silly things boys are!"

Carrying her cap upstairs, Mrs. Grape then attended to two or three household matters. Half an hour had elapsed when she returned to the parlour. Tom had not come in. "How very thoughtless of him!" she cried: "he must know it is his bed time."

But neither she nor Dolly felt any uneasiness until the clock struck ten. A shade of it crept over Mrs. Grape then. What could have become of the boy?

Standing once more upon the door-step, they gazed up and down the road. A few stragglers were passing up from the town: more people would be abroad on a Saturday night than on any other.

"How dost thee this evening, friend Grape?" called out Rachel Deavor, now sitting with her niece at their open parlour window in the moonlight. Mrs. Grape turned to them, and told of Tom's delinquency. Elizabeth Deavor, a merry girl, came out laughing, and linked her arm within Dolly's.

"He has run away from thee to take a moonlight ramble," she said jestingly. "Thee had been treating him to a scolding, may be."

"No, I had not," replied Dolly. "I have such a pretty grey kitten, Elizabeth."

They stood on, talking in the warm summer night, Mrs. Grape with the elder quakeress, Dolly with the younger, and the time went on. The retiring hour of the two ladies had long passed, but they did not like to leave Mrs. Grape to her uncertainty: she was growing more anxious with every minute. At length the clocks struck half past eleven, and Mrs. Grape, to the general surprise, burst into tears.

"Nay, nay now, do not give way," said Rachel Deavor kindly. "Doubtless he has but gone to the other lad's home, and is letting the time pass unthinkingly. Boys will be boys."

"That unaccountable disappearance of my husband makes me more nervous than I should otherwise be," spoke Mrs. Grape in apology. "It is just a year ago. Am I going to have a second edition of that, in the person of my son?"

"Hush thee now, thee art fanciful; thee should not anticipate evil. It is a pity but thee had recognised the boy who came for thy son: some of us might go to the lad's house."

"I wish I had," sighed Mrs. Grape. "I meant to ask Tom who it was when he came in. Tom called him 'Bill'; that is all I know."

"Here he comes!" exclaimed Dolly, who was standing outside the gate with Elizabeth Deavor. "He is rushing round the corner at full speed, mother."

"Won't I punish him!" cried Mrs. Grape in her relieved feelings: and she too went to the gate.

Dolly's eagerness had misled her. It was not Tom. But it was one of Tom's schoolfellows, young Thorn, whom they all knew. He halted to explain that he had been to a boys' party in the Bath Road, and expected to "catch it" at home for staying so late. Dolly interrupted him to speak of Tom.

"What an odd thing!" cried the lad. "Oh, he'll come home presently, safe enough. Which of our fellows are named Bill, you ask, Miss Grape? Let's see? There's Bill Stroud; and Bill Hardwick—that is, William——"

"It was neither Stroud nor Hardwick; I should have known the voices of both," interrupted Mrs. Grape. "This lad cannot, I think, be in your school at all, Thorn: he said his school was to have holiday on Monday because it would be a Saint's Day."

"Holiday because it was a Saint's Day!" echoed Thorn. "Oh then, he must have been one of the college boys. No other school goes in for holidays on the Saints' Days but that. The boys have to go to college, morning and afternoon, so it's not a complete holiday: they can get it easily, though, by asking leave."

"I don't think Tom knows any of the college boys," debated Dolly.

"Yes, he does; our school knows some of them," replied Thorn. "Good night: I can't stay. He is sure to turn up presently."

But Tom Grape did not turn up. At midnight his mother put on her bonnet and shawl and started out to look for him in the now deserted streets of the town. Now and again she would enquire of some late wayfarer whether he had met a boy that night, or perhaps two boys, and described Tom's appearance; but she could learn nothing. The most feasible idea she could call up, and the most hopeful was, that Tom had really gone home with the other lad and that something must have happened to keep him there; perhaps an accident. Dolly felt sure it must be so. Elizabeth Deavor, running in at breakfast time to ask for news, laughingly said Tom deserved to be shaken.

But when the morning hours passed and did not bring the truant or any tidings of him, this hope died away. The first thing to be done was to find out who the other boy was, and to question him. Perhaps he had also disappeared!

Getting from young Thorn the address of those of the college boys—three—who, as he chanced to know, bore the name of William, Mrs. Grape went to make enquiries at their houses. She could learn nothing. Each of the three boys disclaimed all knowledge of the affair; their friends corroborating their assertion that they had not been out on the Saturday night. Four more of the King's scholars were named William, they told her; two of them boarding in the house of the head master.

To this gentleman's residence in the College Green, Mrs. Grape next proceeded. It was then evening. The head master listened

courteously to her tale, and became, in his awakened interest, as anxious as she was to find the right boy. Mrs. Grape said she should not know him, but should know his voice. Not one of the three boys, already seen, possessed the voice she had heard.

The two boarders were called into the room, as a mere matter of form; for the master was able to state positively that they were in bed at the hour in question. Neither of them had the voice of the boy who had called for Tom. It was a very clear voice, Mrs. Grape said; she should know it instantly.

"Let me see," said the master, going over mentally the list of the forty King's scholars: "how many more of you boys are named William, beyond those this lady has seen?"

The boys considered, and said there were two others; William Smith and William Singleton; both called familiarly "Bill" in the school. Each of these boys had clear, pleasant voices, the master observed; but neither of them had applied for leave for Monday, nor had he heard of any projected fishing expedition to Powick.

To the house of the Singletons next went Mrs. Grape: but the boy's voice there did not answer to the one she had heard. The Smith family she could not see; they had gone out for the evening: and she dragged herself home, utterly beaten down both in body and spirit.

Another night of anxiety was passed, and then Mrs. Grape returned to Mr. Smith's and saw "Bill." But Bill was hoarse as a raven; it was not at all the clear voice she had heard; though he looked desperately frightened at being questioned.

So there it was. Tom Grape was lost. Lost! and no clue remained as to the why and wherefore. He must have gone after his father, said the sympathising townspeople, all agape with wonder; and a superstitious feeling crept over Mrs. Grape.

But, ere the week was quite over, news came to the desolate home, not of Tom himself; not of the manner of his disappearance; only of the night it happened. On the Friday evening Mrs. Grape and Dolly were sitting together, when a big boy of sixteen appeared at their door, Master Fred. Smith, lugging in his brother Bill.

"He is come to confess, ma'am," said the elder. "He blurted it all out to me just now, too miserable to keep it in any longer, and I've brought him off to you."

"Oh tell me, tell me where he is!" implored Mrs. Grape from her fevered lips; as she rose and clasped the boy, Bill, by his arm.

"I don't know where he is," answered the boy in trembling earnestness. "I can't think where; I wish I could. I know no more than the dead."

"For what have you come here then?"

"To confess that it was I who was with him. You didn't know my voice on the Monday because I had got such a cold," continued he, laying hold of a chair-back to steady his shaking hands. "I must have caught it playing with Tom that night; we got so hot, both of

us. When I heard he had never been home since, couldn't be found anywhere, I felt frightened to death and didn't like to say it was me who had been with him."

"Where did you leave him? Where did you miss him?" questioned the mother, her heart sinking with despair.

"We kept on playing at titch-touch-last; neither of us would give in, each wanted to have the last touch, and we got down past the Bath Road, and on up Sidbury near to the bridge. Tom gave me a touch; it was the last; and rushed through the commandery gates. I was getting tired then, and a thought came to me that instead of going after him I'd play him a trick and make off home, and I did so, tearing over the bridge as hard as I could tear. And that's all the truth," concluded the boy, bursting into tears, "and I never saw Tom again, and have got no more to tell though the head master hoists me for it to-morrow."

"It is just what he said to me, Mrs. Grape," put in the brother quietly, "and I am sure it is the truth."

"Through the commandery gates," repeated Mrs. Grape, pressing her aching brow. "And you did not see him come out again?"

"No, ma'am, I made off as hard as I could go. While he was rushing down there—I heard his boots clattering on the flags—I rushed over the bridge homewards."

The boy had told all he knew. Now that the confession was made he would be too glad to add more had he been able. It left the mystery just as it was before; no better and no worse. There was no outlet to the commandery, save these gates, and nothing within it that could have swallowed up Tom. He must have come out again by these self-same gates. Whither had he then gone?

It was proved that he did come out. When Mr. Bill Smith's confession was made public, an assistant to a doctor in the town remembered to have seen Tom Grape, whom he knew by sight, as he was passing the commandery about that same time to visit a patient in Wyld's Lane. Tom came flying out at the gates, laughing and looking up and down the street. "Where are you, Bill?" he called out. The young doctor, whose name was Seton, looked back at Tom as he went on his way.

But the young man added something more, which nobody else had thought to speak of, and which afforded a small loop-hole of conjecture as to what poor Tom's fate might have been. Just about that hour a small barge on the canal, after passing under Sidbury bridge, came in contact with another barge. Very little damage was done, but there was a great deal of shouting and confusion. As Mr. Seton walked over the bridge, not a second before he saw Tom, he heard the noise and saw people making for the spot. Had Tom Grape made for it? He could easily have reached it. And, if so, had he, amidst the general pushing and confusion on the bank, fallen into the canal? It was hardly to be thought any accident of this kind could happen to

him *unseen* ; though it might be just possible, for the scene for some minutes was one of tumult ; but nothing transpired to confirm it. The missing lad did not reappear, either dead or alive.

And so poor Tom Grape had passed out of life mysteriously as his father had done. Many months elapsed before his mother gave up her search for him ; she was always thinking he would come home again, always hoping it. His loss affected her more than her husband's had, for he vanished under her very eye, so to say ; all the terror of it was palpably enacted before her, all the suspense had to be borne and lived through ; whereas the other loss took place at a distance and she only grew to realize it by degrees ; which of course softened the blow. And the time went on by years, but nothing was seen of Tom Grape.

That was disappearance the second.

Dolly left her place of business at the end of the three years for which she had been apprenticed, and set up for herself ; a brass plate on her mother's door—"Miss Grape, Mantua-maker"—proclaiming the fact to the world. She was but twenty then, with as sweet a face, the Squire says, as Worcester, renowned though it is for its pretty faces, ever saw. She had never in her heart taken kindly to her business, so would not be likely to set the world afire with her skill ; but she had tried to do her best and would continue to do it. A job began to come in now and then : a gown to be turned or a spenser to be made, though not so many of them as Dolly hoped for : but, as her mother said, Rome was not built in a day.

"Mother, I think I shall go to college this morning."

So spoke Dolly at breakfast one Sunday in July. The sun was shining in at the open window, the birds were singing.

"It's my belief, Dolly, you would go off to college every Sunday of your life, give you your way," said Mrs. Grape.

Dolly laughed. "And so I would, mother."

For the beautiful cathedral service had charms for Dolly. Islip church was a very primitive church, the good old clergyman was toothless, the singing of the two psalms was led off by the clerk in a cracked bass voice ; no organ. Accustomed to nothing better than this, the first time Dolly found herself at the cathedral, after their removal to Worcester, and the magnificent services burst upon her astonished senses, she thought she must be in some celestial sphere. The grand, spacious edifice, the musical chanting of the prayers by the minor canons, the singing of the numerous choir, men and boys, in their white surplices, the deep tones of the swelling organ, the array of white-robed prebendaries, the dignified and venerable bishop—Cornwall—in his wig and lawn sleeves, the state, the ceremony of the whole, and the glittering colours of the famed east window in the distance ; all this laid hold of Dolly's senses for ever. She and her mother attended St. Martin's church generally, but Dolly would now and again

lure her mother to the Cathedral. Latterly Mrs. Grape had been ailing and did not go anywhere.

"If you could but go to college to-day, mother!" went on Dolly.

"Why?"

"Mr. Benson preaches. I met Miss Stafford yesterday afternoon and she told me Mr. Benson had come into residence. The *Herald* said so too."

"Then you must go betimes if you would secure a seat," remarked Mrs. Grape. "And mind you don't get your new muslin skirt torn."

So Dolly put on her new muslin, and her bonnet, and started.

When the Reverend Christopher Benson, Master of the Temple, became one of the prebendaries of Worcester his fame as a preacher flew to all parts of the town. You should hear the Squire's account of the crush in getting into the cathedral on the Sundays that he was in residence: four Sundays in the year; or five, as the case might be; all told. Members of other churches, dissenters of different sects, Quakers, Roman Catholics, and non-worshippers anywhere at other times, scrupled not to run to hear Mr. Benson. For, reading like unto his, or preaching like unto his, had rarely been heard in that cathedral or in any other. Though it might be only the Gospel that fell to his share in the communion service, the crowd listened, enraptured, to his sweet tones. The college doors were besieged before the hour for opening them; it was like going into a theatre.

Dolly, on this day, made one in the crowd at the cloister entrance; she was pushed here and pulled there; and although she ran well with the rest as soon as the doors were unlocked, every seat was taken when she reached the chancel. She found a standing place opposite the pulpit, near King John's tomb, and felt very hot in the crush.

"Is it always like this, here?"

The whispered words came from a voice at her side. Dolly turned, and saw a tall, fine-looking, well-dressed man about thirty, with a green silk umbrella in his hand.

"No," she whispered back again. "Only for three or four Sundays, at this time of year, when Mr. Benson preaches."

"Indeed," said the stranger. "His preaching ought to be something extraordinary to attract such a crowd as this."

"And so it is," breathed Dolly. "And his reading—oh, you never heard any reading like it."

"Very eloquent, I suppose?"

"I don't know whether it may be called eloquence," debated Dolly, remembering that a chance preacher she once heard, who thumped the cushions with his hands and shook the air with his voice was said to be eloquent. "Mr. Benson is the quietest preacher and reader I ever listened to."

The stranger seemed to be a kind man. During the stir made by the clergy, preceded by the six black-robed bowing bedesmen, going up

to the communion table, he found a morsel of room on a bench corner, and secured it for Dolly. She thanked him gratefully.

The sermon came to an end, the bishop gave the blessing from his throne, and the crowd poured out. Dolly, by way of a change, made her exit from the great North entrance. The brightness of the day had changed; a sharp shower was falling.

"Oh my goodness! I shall get my new muslin wet through!" thought Dolly. "This parasol's of no use."

"Will you allow me to offer you my umbrella—or permit me to hold it over you?" spoke the stranger, who must have followed her out. And Dolly hesitated and flushed, and did not know whether she ought to say yes or no.

He held the umbrella over Dolly, letting his own coat get wet. The shower ceased presently; but he walked on by her side to her mother's door, and then departed with a bow fit for an emperor.

"What a polite man he is!" thought Dolly. "Quite the gentleman." And she mentioned the occurrence to her mother; who seemed to-day more poorly than usual.

They sat at the open window in the afternoon, and Dolly read aloud the evening psalms. It was the fifth day of the month. As Dolly finished the last verse and closed the book, Mrs. Grape, after a moment's silence, repeated the words:—

"The Lord shall give strength unto his people: the Lord shall give his people the blessing of peace."

"What a beautiful promise that is, Dolly!" she said in a hushed tone. "Peace! Ah, my dear, nobody can know what that word means until they have been sorely tried. Peace everlasting!"

Mrs. Grape leaned back in her chair, gazing upwards. The sky was of a deep blue; a brilliant cloud of gold-colour, of a peculiar shape, was moving slowly across it just over head.

"One could almost fancy it's God's golden throne in the brighter land," she murmured. "My child, do you know the thought comes across me at times that it may not be long before I am there. And I am getting to long for it."

"Don't say that, mother," cried the startled girl.

"Well well, dear, I don't want to frighten you. It is all as God pleases."

"I shall send to ask Mr. Nash to come to see you to-morrow, mother. Do you feel worse?"

Mrs. Grape slightly shook her head. Presently she spoke.

"Is it not almost tea-time, Dolly? If—whoever is that?"

A gentleman, passing, with a red rose in his button-hole and silk umbrella in his hand, was taking off his hat to Dolly. Dolly's face turned red as the rose as she returned the bow, and whispered to her mother that it was the polite stranger. He halted to express a hope that the young lady had not taken cold from the morning shower.

He turned out to be a Mr. Mapping, a traveller in the wine trade

for some London house. But, when he was stating this to Mrs. Grape during the first visit paid her, he added in a careless, off-hand manner, that he was thankful to say he had good private means and was not dependent upon his occupation. He lingered on in Worcester, and became intimate with the Grapes.

Events thickened. Before the next month, August, came in, Mrs. Grape died. Dolly was stunned; but she would have felt the blow even more keenly than she did, had she not fallen over head and ears in love with Alick Mapping. About three hundred pounds, all her mother's savings, came to Dolly; save for that, and the furniture, she was unprovided for.

"You cannot live upon that: what's a poor three hundred pounds?" spoke Mr. Mapping a day or two after the funeral, his tone full of tender compassion.

"How rich he must be himself!" thought poor Dolly.

"You will have to let me take care of you, child."

"Oh dear!" murmured Dolly.

"We had better be married without delay. Once you are my wife——"

"Please don't go on!" interposed Dolly in a burst of sobs. "My dear mother is hardly buried."

"But what are you to do?" he gently asked. "You will not like to live here alone—and you have no income to live here upon. Your business is worth nothing as yet; it would not keep you in gloves. If I speak of these things prematurely, Dolly, it is for your sake."

Dolly sobbed. The future looked rather desolate.

"You have promised to be my wife, Dolly; remember that."

"Oh, please don't talk of it yet awhile!" sobbed Dolly.

"Leave you here alone I will not; you are not old enough to take care of yourself; you must have a protector. I will take you with me to London, where you will have a good home and be happy in it as a cricket: but you must know, Dolly, that I cannot do that until we are married. All sensible people must say that you will be quite justified under the circumstances."

Mr. Alick Mapping had a wily tongue, and Dolly was persuaded to listen. The marriage was fixed for the first week in September, and the banns were put up at St. Martin's Church; which, as everybody knows, stands in the corn market. Until then Mr. Mapping returned to London; to make, as he told Dolly, preparations for his bride. An acquaintance of Mrs. Grape's, who had been staying with Dolly since the death, would remain to the last. As soon as Dolly was gone, the furniture would be sold by Mr. Stretch, the auctioneer, and the proceeds transmitted to Dolly in London. Mrs. Grape had given all she possessed to Dolly, in the fixed and firm belief that her son was really no more.

But all this was not to go on without a warning from their neighbour,

the Quaker lady. She sent for Dolly in, being confined to her own chamber by illness.

"Thee should not be in this haste, Dorothy," she began. "It is not altogether seemly, child, and it may not be well for thee hereafter. Thee are too young to marry; thee should wait a year or two——"

"But I am not able to wait," pleaded poor Dolly, with tears in her eyes. "How could I continue to live alone in the house—all by myself?"

"Nay, but thee would not have done that. Some one of discreet age would have been glad to come and share expenses with thee. I might have helped thee to a suitable person myself: a cousin of mine, an agreeable and kindly woman, would like to live up this way. But the chief objection that I see to this hasty union, Dorothy," continued Miss Deavor, "is that thee knows next to nothing about the young man."

Dolly opened her eyes in surprise. "Why, I know him quite well, dear Miss Rachel. He has told me all about himself."

"That I grant thee. Elizabeth informs me that thee has had a good account from himself, as to his means and respectability. But thee has not verified it."

"Verified it!" repeated Dolly.

"Thee has not taken steps to ascertain that it is true. How does thee know it to be so?"

Dolly's face flushed. "As if he would deceive me! You do not know him, Miss Deavor."

"Nay, child, I wish not to cast undeserved aspersion on him. But thee should ask for proof that what he tells thee is correct. Before thee ties thyself to him for life, Dorothy, thee will do well to get some friend to make enquiries in London. It is my best advice to thee, child; and it is what thy mother would have done before giving thee to him."

Dolly thanked Miss Deavor and went away with a sob. The advice was well meant, of course, but quite needless. Suspect Alice Mapping of deceit! Dolly would rather have suspected herself. And she did nothing.

The morning of the wedding arrived in due course. Dolly was attiring herself for it in a pretty new grey gown, her straw bonnet trimmed with white satin lying on the bed (to resume her black on the morrow), when Elizabeth Deavor came in.

"I have something to say to thee, Dolly," she began, in a grave tone. "I hardly knew whether to speak to thee or not, feeling not altogether sure of the thing myself, so I asked Aunt Rachel, and she thinks thee ought to be told."

"What is it?" cried Dolly.

"I think I saw thy brother Tom last night."

The words gave Dolly a curious shock. She fell back in a chair.

"I will relate it to thee," said Elizabeth. "Last evening I was at

Aunt Rachel's window above stairs, when I saw a boy in dark clothes standing on the pavement outside, just opposite thy gate. It was a bright night, as thee knows. He had his arms folded and stood quite still, gazing at this house. The moonlight shone on his face and I thought how much it was like poor lost Tom. I went down stairs and stepped to our gate, to ask whether he was in want of any one: and then, Dolly, I felt queerer than I ever felt in my life, for I saw that it was Tom. At least, I thought so."

"Did he speak?" gasped Dolly.

"He neither spoke nor answered me: he turned off quickly down the road. I think it was Tom; I do indeed."

"What am I to do?" cried Dolly. "Oh, if I could but find him!"

"There's nothing to do, that we can see," answered the young Quakeress. "I have talked it over with Aunt Rachel. It would appear as though he did not care to show himself: else, if it were truly thy brother, why did he not come in? I will look out for him every night and speak to him if he appears again. I promise thee that, Dolly."

"Why do you say 'appears,' Elizabeth?" cried the girl, catching at the word. "You think it was himself, do you not; not his—his spirit?"

"Truly, I can but conclude it was himself."

Dolly, in a fine state of bewilderment, what with one thing or another, was married to Mr. Mapping in St. Martin's Church, by its white-haired rector, Digby Smith. A yellow post-chaise waited at the church gates and carried them to Tewkesbury. The following day they went on by coach to Gloucester, where Mr. Mapping intended to stay a few days before proceeding to London.

They took up their quarters at a comfortable country inn on the outskirts of the town. On the second day after their arrival, Dolly, about to take a country walk with her husband, ran down stairs from putting her bonnet on, and could not see him. The barmaid told her he had gone into the town to post a letter, and asked Dolly to step into the bar-parlour to wait.

It was a room chiefly used by commercial travellers. Dolly's attention was caught by something over the mantel-piece. In a small glass-case, locked, there was the portrait of a man cleverly done in pencil; by its side hung a plain seal and key attached to a short black ribbon: and over all was a visiting-card, inscribed in ink "Mr. Gardner." Dolly looked at this and turned sick and faint: it was her father's likeness; her father's watch, seal, and ribbon. Of an excitable nature she burst into sobbing tears, and the barmaid ran in. There and then, the mystery so long hanging about Robert Grape's fate was cleared up, so far as it ever would be in this world.

He had left Bridgenorth on the Thursday morning. Towards the evening of the following day, Friday, he appeared at this very inn.

This same barmaid, an obliging and modest-mannered young woman, presenting a rare contrast to the bar girls of the present day, saw him come in. His face had a peculiar, gray shade upon it, which attracted her notice, and she asked him if he felt ill. He answered that he felt pretty well then, but supposed he must have had a fainting fit when walking into the town, for to his surprise he found himself on the grass by the road side, waking up from a sort of stupor. He engaged a bed-room for the night, and she thought he said—but she had never been quite sure—that he had come to look out for a horse at the horse fair to be held in Gloucester the next day. He took no supper, not “feeling up to it,” he said, but drank a glass of weak brandy-and-water, and ate a biscuit with it, before going up to bed. The next morning he was found dead; had apparently died quietly in his sleep. An inquest was held, and the medical men testified that he had died of heart disease. Poor Dolly, listening to this, wondered whether the pitch out of the gig at Bridgenorth had fatally injured him.

“We supposed him to be a Mr. Gardner,” continued the barmaid, “as that card”—pointing to it—“was found in his pocket-book. But we had no clue as to who he was or whence he came. His stockings were marked with a ‘G’ in red cotton; and there was a little money in his pocket-book, just enough to pay the expenses of the funeral.”

“But that likeness,” said Dolly. “How did you come by it? Who took it?”

“Ah, ma’am, it was a curious thing, that—but such things do not happen by chance. An idle young man of the town used to frequent our inn; he was clever at drawing and would take off a likeness of anybody near him with a few strokes of a pen or pencil in a minute or two, quite surreptitious like and for his own amusement. Wonderful likenesses they were. He was in the bar-parlour, this very room, ma’am, while the stranger was drinking his brandy-and-water, and he dashed off this likeness.”

“It is *exactly* like,” said poor Dolly.

“When nobody came forward to identify the stranger, the landlord got the sketch given up to him. He put it in this case with the watch and seal and card, and hung it where you see, hoping that sometime or other it might be recognised. That’s how it was, ma’am.”

So that the one disappearance, that of Robert Grape, was now set at rest.

And I am sorry that the telling of all these matters has lengthened itself out beyond anticipation. Dolly’s own history will have to be concluded next month.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

IN THE NEW FOREST.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, AUTHOR OF "ROUND ABOUT NORWAY."



A FOREST OWL.

THOSE who know nothing of the New Forest have yet to become acquainted with one of the loveliest and most charming spots in England. So near the Metropolis, the wonder is that it is not as much sought after as the popular and often more remote seaside places to which people crowd in multitudes. And probably this would be the case if inns were as plentiful in the Forest as the bracken and the bright scarlet fungi that adorn it; beneath which the fairies encamp and hold their moonlit revels, dancing and capering on midsummer nights to the music of the leaves gently stirred by the night breezes: melodies too refined and ethereal for our coarser natures to enter into and comprehend.

We can only listen to the murmur that is going on: we hear the sighing and the southing: the surgings that sweep and vibrate through the long ferny glades and overarching avenues, finding most voice where the forest grows most dense. But we stand without the charmed circle, and listen as we listen to the murmur of the streams that are everywhere at hand; enchanted, awestruck, perhaps wondering what all these Voices of Nature are saying one to another, but not understanding. The fairy folk alone are in perfect sympathy with the music of their own special realm. We are not admitted into their secrets.

But the inns and hostelries in and about the New Forest are few and far between. When people go down in multitudes, they will have to camp out; take their own tents and beds with them: just as in the old days, when people went out to tea, they carried their own cup and saucer. Or some might prefer the more substantial comforts

of a caravan: one day settling down upon the borders of the Forest, overlooking acres and acres of heathery moorland, that in its season blooms out in rich colours, delighting the eye and the senses, charging the breezes with rich fragrance; the next pitching their tent in the very heart of a dense wood, where the branches meet overhead and shut out the hot sun, and where the eye may trace forests of aisles and arches, and trees intersecting each other like the pillars of a cathedral.

What an experience it would be! A caravan and a chosen few, and for the hottest, brightest month of the year, to pass a roving, gipsy, Bohemian existence, throwing aside all the trammels and constraints of society, and living a pure, free life, glorying in the beauties of Nature, as pristine and primitive as she was a thousand years ago; revelling in the scent of the firs, the sweet incense of the burning, crackling cones that boiled our kettle; rejoicing in the crisp sound of the bracken, as, wandering beside the streams, we trod it under foot—and cannot help treading it under foot, it grows in such wealth and profusion. Each day given to a section of the forest; and some sections should be so beautiful that to each two or three days might be devoted.

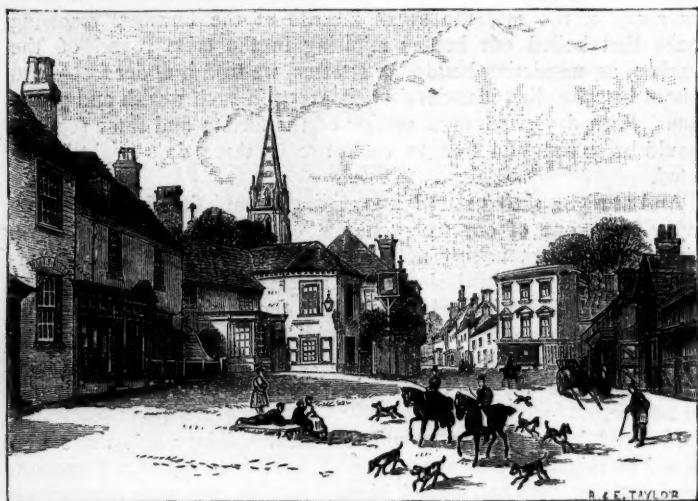
And at night, sitting round a crackling, scent-laden fire lighting up happy faces, one of our "chosen few" should play the zither, and draw out its heart-touching notes; another should have a sweet, far-reaching voice; a third should be a learned fiddler, and give us strains more fantastic and weird than those with which Paganini was wont to astonish his hearers: whilst a fourth, with a gift of memory, should thrill us with stories full of ghostly, legendary lore, repeating by the way all that Shakespeare had to say about the present scene.

It would be a glorious month, an ideal holiday: and those who passed by might envy us as much as I envied an old man I encountered one day, who had settled himself outside the trees overlooking one of the splendid moors. *His* caravan looked the essence of cleanliness and comfort, he the picture of a patriarch. Long, grey, flowing locks, a ruddy countenance, a bright eye, clear-cut features; a quiet, patient expression, such as we not infrequently see on the aged, when life's evening is closing, and the sun draws near the horizon, and they have a more glorious dawn to look forward to than this world can ever show them.

The old man's pot was swung on a tripod, and the fire beneath was blazing and crackling, but the blue smoke curling about the *marmite* was not allowed to enter. I felt inclined to lift the lid, and acquaint myself with the savoury mess it contained—very savoury of its kind, be sure. I daresay the old man would have been glad enough of company at his midday meal; but my little horse was restive, and declared, as plainly as if he had spoken, that if I dismounted and tied him to the wheel, beside the caravan horse, I should never mount him again. For this little horse was not a common every-day horse;

he was swift of foot and sure of temper (especially when he had his own way), could fly like the wind, or trot gently with a two-year-old child upon his back. He was of some pedigree, too; had run several races, and, what is more to the purpose, had won them all. And he had been christened by wide-spread, universal consent, the *Pride of the Forest*.

The old man was gathering sticks, when I first saw him, to replenish his fire and keep the pot boiling—in a world unknown to him often a more difficult task than he found it to-day. He touched his cap as I stopped, bade me good morrow in a cheerful voice that yet had in it a ring of resignation corresponding with the look upon his



LYNDHURST.

face; remarked on the fineness of the day and admired the beauty of my little animal. We had some talk together; and the spirit almost moved me to ask him about his past life, and why he was alone now, quite alone, in his old age. Whether death had robbed him of his life companion, or whether he had been a solitary man all his days? That, I felt, was impossible; he did not look like it. He had had a history and an active life. His better-half no doubt had reached the summit of the mountain before him, and entered the bark steered by the pale boatman. His turn would come before long. But I thought I would first take home my restless little *Pride*, and return in the afternoon for a long, quiet chat, lead him gently into the past, and by attention and sympathy learn his history.

Alas! that afternoon saw no return, and the next morning the spot was deserted; the caravan and the old man were gone; nothing left

to mark what had been but a black round patch upon the moor, and a few charred embers. Across there the trees were waving and glinting in the bright sun, in all the rich tints of autumn ; a wealth of gorgeous colouring indescribably lovely, before which words are as nothing, and the very brush of the artist trembles with something of despair. But the little picture in the foreground, which yesterday had given it so much life and animation, had been so quietly picturesque, and so vividly touched a responsive chord in one's nature, had dissolved and disappeared, and left nothing behind it but a recollection, an unsatisfied longing, an untold story.

Leaving Waterloo by a midday train, after a journey of about



RUFUS'S STONE.

eighty-five miles you reach Lyndhurst Station, whilst the afternoon is yet young. On the road you pass Winchester, about which we may have something to say by-and-by; and presently, winding round Southampton Water, that to-day develops long reaches of unsightly, uninteresting, depressing mud, the train stops at Southampton West. One or two more stations, and we are at *Lyndhurst Road*.

Here very few passengers alighted, and only two entered the shabby, ramshackle omnibus that represents the inn at Lyndhurst and has to traverse the two miles of road separating the village from the station. Shabby as it is, there is no doubt as to its strength, for the men pitch heavy boxes on to the roof as if they were having a game at shuttlecock, and they come crashing down with a sound that sends one flying out again before worse happens. Worse, however, does not happen, and we return to our seats expecting to see the roof cracked and split into sections like a geographical puzzle. It is quite entire.

The driver smiled, a mixture of benignity and pity. "You're a bit nervous, mayhap, sir," he said, "but there's no need. The gentlemen from London ain't accustomed to this kind of thing. I've often remarked they don't know a strong 'bus when they see one."

It was in vain to assure him that we knew an old one at least, and that the strength of youth never accompanied the infirmities of age. The argument did not tell.

"Bless you, sir!" he returned, "this omnibus is good for another twenty years or more. It's only for the look of the thing that our people have had a new one built, and it will be out this very day for the first time. I daresay we shall see it when we get to Lyndhurst. But I'd rather drive the old one, after all."

We admired his constancy, and in another minute were jogging over a well-made road. The springs, at any rate, had long since given way; so that in the matter of endurance it would seem that wood has the advantage over iron.

The only other occupant of the vehicle was a female who looked like a respectable housekeeper. Probably she was going to one of the great houses in the neighbourhood to take command of the domestic establishment and rule over the servants' hall. It was not difficult to see that with so gentle a creature they would have an easy time of it. Ever and anon she looked out on both sides of the road, thought it would be "main dull in the winter," and wondered how she should like it after a London life.

It was a glorious drive, that two miles between the station and the village. On either side lay the forest, the trees changing to rich autumn tints. Thick bracken grew in all directions, some of it six feet high. At the end of the two miles we reached Lyndhurst, a village consisting of a long, straggling street, picturesque, but with no special feature to attract attention. Winding up the hill between the village houses, the grand new omnibus referred to by the driver at the station suddenly shot from its shed and crossed our path like a comet, bringing out admiring eyes from many a doorway, and creating quite a hubbub of small excitement. Then we came to the inn, and the end of the second stage of my journey.

Opposite stood the church, comparatively new, remarkable for its elevated position—moderately speaking: as if the planners and builders had determined to make the way to church impossible to some, difficult for all. It is not distinguished for beauty, inside or out, but contains a fresco, by Leighton, of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, almost worth a visit to Lyndhurst in itself. Of this, Mrs. Short, of Lyndhurst, has made a large and excellent photograph reflecting great credit upon her skill. Her views of the New Forest are equally good.

The church happened to be open, and whilst waiting for a conveyance to continue the third part of my journey, I used the favourable conjunction of open doors and spare moments for making a circuit of the interior. A pretty and amiable young woman was rubbing brasses,

and otherwise adorning and cleaning the church. Itself modern, it stands on the site of an edifice not much more ancient than itself, it is said, and far less sightly, that was pulled down to make way for the requirements of an increasing population. The fresco stood out grandly from the very end of the aisle, but only when close to it was all its grace and beauty, softness and refinement, seen to perfection.

Going back to the inn, the conveyance to take me to Stoney Cross soon came round. The new omnibus was still flourishing up and down the village street, "the cynosure of neighbouring eyes." My Jehu was enraptured.

"A rare fine one, sir," said he, gazing with pride at what must add so much to the reputation of his house. "Red velvet inside, comfortable seats on the top. Now, wouldn't you, sir, like to step down, and have a good look at her?" This was said in such a tone as one might use towards a schoolboy upon taking him to a pastrycook's and offering him sundry dainties. But by this time I was comfortably packed in the little waggonette, and resisted the offer.

"About time you had a new omnibus," I said. "First impressions go for much, and seeing this antediluvian vehicle at the station, makes one wonder whether everything else at Lyndhurst is after the same pattern."

The old man laughed. "I don't think I'm a great way better," said he. "I've been here more than forty year, and I've grown old with hard work, like the 'bus. But I've got some go in me yet, and so has she. We shall keep her for wet days, like a double set of harness."

"And you—will you come out on fine days, like the new conveyance?"

"Ah! ah!" he cried, with a melancholy chuckle: "I'm only a postboy, not an omnibus. I must take the rough with the smooth, the fair with the foul. I've grown old at that kind of work, but not rusty. When I tumble to pieces, the spring will be well worn out."

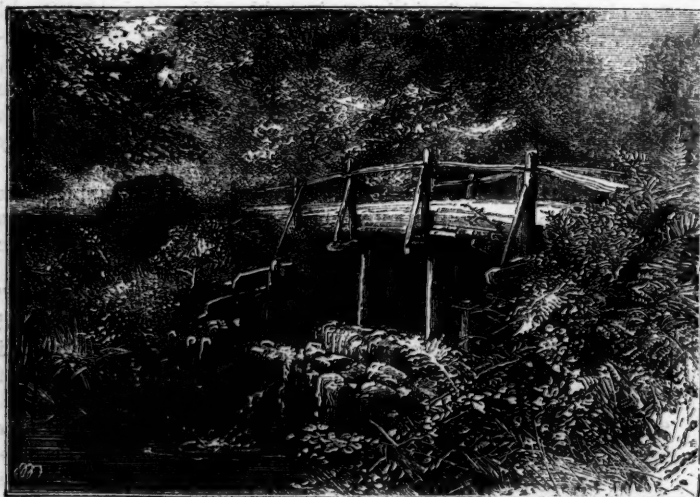
He was still a hale, tough old fellow; and if we should both be living ten years hence, and I should visit Stoney Cross, likely enough he may be there to drive me.

We turned from the inn and very soon had left Lyndhurst behind us. Some time before visiting the New Forest, an old friend had said to me:

"You must get out at Lyndhurst Road, take the omnibus to Lyndhurst village, there hire a conveyance to take you to Stoney Cross, and make the Compton Arms, in the very heart of the Forest, your head-quarters. You will find yourself as happy as the day is long, and as comfortable as Mr. and Mrs. Coggin can make you."

There is hardly a nook or cranny in England that my friend does not know, scarcely a palatial mansion that he has not visited. He has oftentimes been the guest of royalty as well as of less exalted individuals, and was therefore supposed to know something about the matter.

For this reason I was bound for the Compton Arms, Stoney Cross. I hardly knew to what I was going, but pictured a small village, with the usual accompaniment of straggling geese and children—the latter much more noisy and disagreeable than the former. I expected to have to retire late to rest and rise up early to avoid the annoyance of broken sleep by the thousand-and-one village sounds that are fifty times more disturbing than the continuous roar of a great city, or the everlasting beat and splash of the surge upon the sea-shore. The latter, indeed, is soothing rather than otherwise. But the “cock’s shrill



RUSTIC BRIDGE IN THE NEW FOREST.

clarion,” the waking-up of animal life, the commencement of village domestic occupations—these are only to be borne with calmness by those who can sleep through a battle and be undisturbed by an earthquake.

Meanwhile I was on the road to my unknown quarters. It was sufficient happiness for the time being, guarantee sufficient for that which was to come. Nothing could be more glorious and beautiful than the drive, especially as, after passing, on the left, the Kennels of the New Forest Foxhounds, we made progress, and entered more into the solitude of the forest. We could not, of course, leave the high road and penetrate into the heart of the woods; but as we went we obtained long, lovely views of glades, forest aisles and arches, beautiful bracken fronds, all full of golden, ruddy autumn tints. Here and there squirrels ran quickly across our path, with their long bushy tails and twinkling eyes; looking far prettier and more graceful than they do when shut up in their little cages, performing almost the penance of Sisyphus without having his sins to answer for.

We turned to the left and ascended the hill towards Minstead, but looked in vain far down the glades for the red deer, once so plentiful in the Forest, subsequently so scarce, and now once more flourishing in numbers. It was the wrong time of the day for them; they seldom show themselves except at early morning or late evening.

Minstead has in itself no especial feature, except a small, quaint old church, and a primitive, very clean-looking inn. Its sign, "The Trusty Servant," hung high up, a copy of the figure to be found in the entry of the kitchen at St. Mary's College, Winchester: a curious compound of a man, a hog, a deer, and an ass.

We were now more than half-way on our road. Turning to the left, we ascended the hill, still with the grand trees about us, long stretches of views into the interior of the Forest. Birds were



THE COMITON ARMS.

chattering and squirrels were jumping from bough to bough; fern fronds and bracken obstructed one's path in loveliest but somewhat irritating confusion, causing a longing for a whole forest of deer to eat up a pathway at least, and make one's way through the thickets a little less difficult. Every now and then a stream, heard but unseen, sent forth its musical sound, a constant rippling and murmuring: forest voices that almost seemed to make more palpable the utter silence and solitude that surrounded us.

Reaching the top of the hill, we came upon a clear open space, a ridge commanding one of the most magnificent views in the New Forest. In the far distance might be seen the calm, sparkling Southampton Water, twelve miles off; the Isle of Wight beyond. On the right was spread out a rich carpet of trees, wave upon wave of billowy verdure, gradually sloping into a valley, more lovely than ever to-day, with every varying tone of autumn: a wealth of gorgeous colouring, every imaginable tint of brown, yellow, and

golden. A long, straight, open road now lay before us, and at a little distance stood a solitary house with a sign before it swinging in the wind.

"Is that the Compton Arms?" I asked the talkative old driver, who had entertained me as we came along with the history of everything and everybody connected with the New Forest for the last hundred years.

"Ay, sir; that's the Compton Arms, sure enough. And mighty comfortable you'll be there."

It was so different from what I had pictured it (things always are different from our picturings) that I could hardly take in the information. Instead of a small, rural village, in place of an inn under the very shadow of the great forest trees, behold a solitary road-side house; no other place near it, separated by a certain amount of heathery moorland from all trees; in the very heart of the forest certainly; trees everywhere to be seen, yet none to speak of very near to us. It was much better so. A situation more healthy and bracing than if it had been down in the valley, buried in gloom.

The first thing we saw was a herd of black pigs and geese mingling together in friendly understanding, grazing and taking their walks abroad—for they were soon out of sight. I wondered whether they would come back with their proper number, or whether a straggler would take it into his head to go forth and see the world—to return a sadder and a wiser pig. But the pigs and the geese stray far and wide, and are never lost; and one herd will mix with another, and sometimes have a pitched battle, and separate again without getting confused as to their own identity; each goes his own way, and each knows to what party he belongs.

By the time I was fairly settled at the Compton Arms, the shades of evening were beginning to fall. There was very little more to be done that day except stroll out in front and watch the sunset gild the forest and flush the sky with the clear bright tones one sees only in autumn. Days when a certain healthy sharpness in the air tells you very distinctly that, in spite of possible and occasional warm intervals, summer is gone, and pale winter and cold winds and naked, shivering trees are at hand.

No shivering trees to-night, but warm-tinted, well-clothed branches, glowing red in the sun, that presently sank below the horizon: and night quickly and very effectually shut in the world.

Strolling out on the heath later on, the darkness and solitude and silence were almost appalling. One could only stand perfectly still and enjoy the effect in all its intensity and perfection. A black mass of foliage was spread in front, and not a sound came from the depths of the forest. Its living creatures were safe in their nests and lairs, fast asleep—the sleep of animal life which always seems to have one eye open, and in a moment rouses and falls back again into unconsciousness—a faculty we may well envy but cannot attain to.

Straight from the whirl and unrest of London, this solitude fell upon the spirit with a soothing sense inexpressibly grateful, more healing to exhausted nerves than all the draughts and potions in the whole pharmacopœia. The stars above glittered a thousand-fold and alone seemed to respond to one's sense of companionship; whilst the Great Bear pursuing his course and directing one's gaze instinctively to the North Star, carried one's thoughts seawards. There, possibly, at this very moment, a brave vessel might be straining every timber to ride safely through mountainous waters, and many a brave heart, perhaps, would have given its dearest possessions to be standing safe and sound in the midst of this dark solitude.

"Those that go down to the sea in ships, and occupy their business in great waters; these men see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep."

We were surrounded by wonders here, too, but of a more peaceful, less awful kind: the wonders of earth and sky. Not far off, it is true—twelve miles away—the sea began its reign; a reign of peace or terror according to its moods: but how furiously the billows might lash, how high the waves might roll, how despairing might be the cry of a sinking crew, none of it all could ever penetrate to and destroy this silence.

I had strolled to the very edge of the woods, and in the little distance the lights of the inn gleamed out in a bright, friendly manner, suggesting that this chilly night, the warm, fire-lit, candle-lit room, with closed shutters and drawn curtains, a comfortable easy chair and a favourite book, was perhaps a more sensible manner of passing the time, than wandering about these ancient dominions, risking pitfalls, or coming full tilt against the trees, like honest Sancho Panza warring with the windmills.

I was not long in finding out that all the praises sung in favour of the Compton Arms were even short of its merits, and that our host and hostess made the comfort of a guest their first consideration. It was strange to meet with anything so well ordered and organised in this out-of-the-way, secluded spot. If it were more widely known, it would soon have to expand its walls and raise its roof; and even then rooms would have to be made sure of in advance—as is not infrequently the case now. The cooking of the establishment would satisfy an epicure, and the dairy supplies were in keeping with the artistic resources of the kitchen department. Unlimited cream of the richest kind, butter of exquisite flavour—all made on the premises, and therefore beyond the unpleasant suspicion that so often lurks about London supplies.

I rather dwell upon the merits of the Compton Arms, Stoney Cross, near Lyndhurst (to be precise in the address), because it is a rarity in its way. Rare to discover in a spot where one would expect nothing but the resources of a bare road-side inn, all the civility, attention, and in every reasonable sense of the word, the

comfort of a metropolitan hotel. Not gilded staircases, of course, or marble corridors; not painted ceilings or silken hangings; but large, comfortable bed-rooms and excellent beds, one capital sitting-room upstairs, and one or two smaller ones below—and no man in his travels should ask for more—and few will get as much as they will find at the Compton Arms.

But the charm of the place is in its isolation, and because it is in the very heart of the Forest. You may go out and in five minutes find yourself in the depths of the silent woods, surrounded by lovely glades and avenues and long vistas of trees, the bracken crackling and crisping under your feet, the falling leaves rustling (if it is autumn) as you stir amongst them, with a sound so exhilarating, which you enjoy just as much as the very children themselves—yourself the greatest child.

And, I have said, all this silence, solitude and beauty are so refreshing, so restoring, after the exhausting life and labour of the world: whether it be the labour of work or of pleasure—the midnight oil of study or the midnight blaze of dissipation. To run down from London and take a week of this life, or even a few days, makes a new man of you. The gloomy thoughts and dark forebodings, the restless longing for something different—we hardly knew what in our unrest—all disappear. The mind resumes its tone, nerves and body are re-braced; you wonder what could have been amiss a week ago.

If you are a good pedestrian, you may take long walks *ad libitum*; a fresh walk every day; or if inclined for a gallop across country, you may join the meet and come in at the tail of the hunt if not at the death. And winning this tail will do you just as much suit and service, from a healthful point of view, as if you had won the other. This one, too, you may keep; no one seeks to deprive you of the honour; but the other you would probably feel bound to offer to those bright eyes, those loosened locks and glowing cheeks, “flushed with the hue of health,” in all the attraction of “maiden meditation, fancy free,” that came in only a few seconds behind you—perhaps to be fancy free no longer. Oh! beware! beware!

The next morning, how different and glorious was the view from the windows of the inn. Once more I thought how far better was its situation than if we had been down in a hollow, in a relaxing air, surrounded by overshadowing trees and falling leaves—influences so depressing—and all the village sounds of life and boisterous merriment and daily labour, that in rustic settlements stand out with such startling emphasis.

In place of the dark pall stretching last night over the valley and rising beyond, this morning there was a magnificent sea of leaves, “surging in mighty billows,” glinting in sunshine and in all the tints of autumn that are so indescribably beautiful. From the back of the inn the view was very different in character, more pastoral and cultivated. We looked upon rich, far-off fields and well-kept

hedges, smooth lawns, slopes gently wooded; whilst in the distance beyond, to the right, Southampton water lay cold and sleeping in the sunshine.

My first pilgrimage was to Rufus's Stone, which marks the spot where King William II. was shot by Walter Tyrrell all those centuries ago. As the spot then looked, so it looks now, save that the tree



CAMPING OUT.

against which the arrow glanced has disappeared. Indeed, many parts of the forest are unchanged since the days when it was first founded.

Crossing the heath, passing some gravel pits, where a labourer was hard at work, with whom one stopped to exchange civilities, and descending a somewhat steep road, bounded on one side by the heath, on the other by the forest, we looked over the tops of many of the trees in a way that seemed to give us power and command over nature, a strange, delightful sense of soaring. In about five minutes the stone stood out in a tolerably clear space upon the green-sward, each of the three sides bearing an inscription.

The original stone had been so defaced by people carving their names upon it, that it was encased by this iron structure, which to a certain extent defies the power of the knife, and the efforts of those who are too eager to leave behind them wherever they go such records of their folly. The very trees of the forest are not sacred to these destroyers, and names and initials were deeply carved upon the bark of many a noble oak, many a fine beech, in the very teeth of the notices warning against the practice.

How vividly passed before one that scene that took place nearly a thousand years ago, when a king lost his life at the hands of a subject. If purposely done, what remorse must have been his: if an accident, what sorrow and regret! We can imagine the sad procession: the monarch carried to a neighbouring hut; thence, in the evening, taken on a rough cart, through the gloomy forest and the long dark roads, to Winchester; a mournful, melancholy transport; though in those days probably they thought less of death and changes—"Le roi est mort, vive le roi!"—than we do in this later and more civilized age. Still, a king was a king, whatever might have been his life; and great must have been the cry and stir that vibrated throughout the country, spread by the slow-reaching channels of report.

From the stone the road stretched upwards over the heath, but the slope of the hill hid the inn from view. To the right the wood grew thick and dense, and in its recesses one might easily stray and be lost. Following the road downwards, I soon came to the small village of Brook, with its inevitable inn and swinging sign. Here a magpie hopping mischievously about, came up and boldly inspected me, chattering in a tame and very impudent manner. Finally it went off in triumph with a bright steel chain thrown to it by the landlord of the inn, which it stowed away cunningly behind a wagon in the yard. Passing on over a rustic, picturesque bridge, I turned to the right into the wood and followed the course of the stream for some distance.

Nothing could be more lovely than the scene. The banks of the stream were lined with a wealth of fern and bracken, and the water rippled along with the most musical of sounds. The trees arched and met overhead; the sun threw long shadows into the wood. Bright scarlet fungi grew in profusion, and the tender fronds of the younger bracken were of the most transparent green and gold, as they held up their delicate structures to the light.

In the hot summer months, to come and picnic here with a favourite book would be high bliss. Still better to go further into the depths, out of sound and reach of the high road, and pitch one's tent—which may easily be done—and pass the days sketching or reading, or lounging and doing nothing but enjoying the bare fact of existence, free and happy as primeval man. Burdened perhaps with a load of sin, sorrow and suffering as yet unknown to him; but possessing a thousand-and-one advantages, sources of happiness, civilization and refinement, to which he was equally a stranger.

LADY ENNERDALE'S JEWELS.

"YOU will certainly either lose that case, or have it stolen from you, one of these days," said Lord Ennerdale to his wife, in that peculiarly acidulated tone which her ladyship disliked above all things to hear.

It was the 20th of December. Lord and Lady Ennerdale were going down to Fairmead to spend Christmas with Mr. and Mrs. Nugent Dawson. Quite a distinguished company were to meet there, and Lady Ennerdale had determined to take her diamonds. She felt sure that no such necklace as hers would be seen at Fairmead. It was not merely that the stones of which it was composed were remarkable for their weight and brilliancy, it was the fact of their being so inimitably matched as regarded size and quality that gave the necklace an almost unique reputation among such baubles. It had come down to the present Earl from his great grandfather, who had brought it with him from India (there were strange stories afloat at the time as to the mode in which he had become possessed of it), and it was looked upon as being as much a part of the entailed property as Wychcombe itself.

There was a second family jewel of lesser value than the necklace, but almost as highly prized, in a certain emerald bracelet, which had been an heirloom in the Ennerdale family for generations, and had glittered on the arm of one Countess after another from the days of Queen Anne until now.

That Lady Ennerdale duly prized these family treasures need hardly be said, but being naturally of a somewhat forgetful and unsuspicious disposition, her husband more than once had felt himself compelled to beg of her to look more carefully after their safe keeping. On one occasion her ladyship had left her jewel-case behind her, when returning from a country visit, and had not discovered her loss till the train had taken her twenty miles on her homeward journey. In this instance the telegraph was at once put into requisition, and no harm ensued.

Another time there was clear evidence that an attempt had been made to enter her dressing-room at home, with what intention there could be little doubt. The attempt, however, had been foiled, but even had it been successful the thieves would not have found the booty they were doubtless in search of, the Earl having taken the precaution to deposit the necklace and other valuables with his bankers only a few days previously. Knowing, as he did, how forgetful his wife often was, even over matters of much importance, it was not to be wondered at that his lordship sometimes felt an uneasy qualm with regard to the safety of the family jewels.

In the present instance, in order that there might be no mistake in the matter, her ladyship, before leaving Grosvenor Square, had with her own hands put the case under the seat of the brougham. A larger case, containing less valuable articles, was in charge of Piper, her maid. All had gone well till King's Cross was reached. Here the Earl, alighting first, went forward at once into the booking-hall. Half a minute later her ladyship followed him, carrying Carlo under one arm, but serenely forgetful of the fate of the jewel-case left under the seat of the brougham. The Earl had obtained his tickets and was counting his change, when a horrible recollection flashed across her ladyship's brain. Setting Carlo unceremoniously down, she ran across the booking-hall in a very undignified manner for a countess, and was just in time to see the brougham disappear round the corner on its way back from the station.

A porter was despatched after it at full speed, and five minutes later Lady Ennerdale had the satisfaction of having the jewel-case placed in her hands. Then it was that the Earl, who had followed her out, had said to her in his iciest tones: "You will certainly either lose that case, or have it stolen from you, one of these days." It was his only rebuke, but her ladyship felt it keenly. She was thankful when Fairmead was reached, and the case safely deposited, for the time being, in Mr. Nugent Dawson's strong-room.

When Emily Standish, the daughter of a poor commoner of good family, became the wife of the Earl of Ennerdale everybody said that she had married for position, and to a certain extent everybody was right. But when everybody said it was impossible that she could ever love her husband—a man nearly twice her age—a man whose days and nights were given up to fighting the battles of the Opposition—then everybody for once proved to be in the wrong. When Lady Ennerdale married her husband she respected him greatly, and liked him a little. By the time her wedding ring was six months old she had learned to love him in all sincerity—also to fear him a little, which latter was perhaps a wholesome state of feeling, seeing that with the best heart in the world her ladyship was still somewhat of a feather-brain.

Some of her friends who had never experienced more than a tepid liking for their husbands could not imagine what the Countess could see in a man like Ennerdale to make her so *tête montée* about him. To them he seemed nothing more than a high-dried, undemonstrative Scotchman who wore check trousers and thick shoes, and talked with a north-country burr, and who was rarely to be seen without a Blue Book in close proximity to him. They had never penetrated that husk of shyness in which the hard-headed Scotchman shut himself up from all save a few intimates. They remembered that when a young man, and before he came into the title, he had been noted for his eccentricities and quaint practical jokes. But they did not know, or else they had conveniently forgotten, that he had been equally noted for goodness of heart, and a free-handed generosity that

had often made him the victim of designing knaves. Time had doubtless taught him the wisdom of reticence in many ways, but it had not spoilt his good heart, as his wife was not long in finding out. In his love she found a safe and sunny anchorage from which there was no danger of her ever drifting away.

Christmas Eve was here, and there was to be a grand dinner-party at Fairmead. "I shall wear my diamond necklace to-night," said Lady Ennerdale to her maid.

"The very thing, my lady, to go with your pink satin," remarked Piper, obsequiously.

Tea was set out in Mrs. Nugent Dawson's boudoir for such of the ladies as chose to partake of it previously to dressing for dinner. To several of them this half-hour's interlude of tea and gossip, to which the gentlemen were not admitted, was one of the most agreeable episodes of the day. Before going downstairs this evening, Lady Ennerdale passed out of her own room and through the bed-room into her husband's dressing-room beyond. His lordship was busy among his letters, as he generally was at this time of the day.

"Hard at work as usual," said Lady Ennerdale, as she stooped and touched her husband's forehead lightly with her lips.

"The post leaves in half an hour, and I have three letters still to answer," replied the Earl. "After that I shall go down to the library."

"I thought of wearing my diamonds to-night," said her ladyship.

"To be sure, my dear, why not? Dawson has got the case locked up in his strong-room. Piper has only to ask for it."

As the Countess went down stairs she met Piper coming up with the jewel-case, which Mr. Dawson had just handed to her. Six o'clock was striking as they passed each other.

Whilst Lady Ennerdale was taking tea, Piper thought it would be a good opportunity for her to spend half an hour in the servants' hall. No one loved a gossip more than Piper, and it was not in her nature to resist any occasion of gratifying her weakness. No sooner had she safely conveyed the jewel-box into Lady Ennerdale's dressing-room, than she slipped down stairs on her own account, and in a few moments was plunged in the delights of a violent flirtation.

Time passes quickly when thus employed, and when Piper thought that twenty minutes had gone she was horrified to find that nearly an hour had elapsed since she first came down. The remembrance of the neglected jewel-case flashed across her, and jumping up with a shriek that considerably startled her companions, and put all romantic notions to flight, she quitted the room with as much haste as ghosts are said to disappear at cock-crow.

Seven o'clock was striking as Piper hurried back up stairs. Time had passed so pleasantly that for once she was really frightened to find how late it was. She hoped most devoutly that her mistress was not waiting for her, and as she ran up stairs her ready brain coined a pleasant little fiction with which to turn away the sting of her ladyship's anger.

On trying the door of the dressing-room Piper found it locked. She gave a timid little knock, to which there was no response. Then she knocked again, more loudly, and cried in her affected tones, "My lady—are you there?" Still no answer. Then she went to the next door in the corridor, which was that of the Countess's bed-room. That also was locked, as was the third door she tried, which opened into the Earl's dressing-room. Slightly puzzled, Piper went down again at full speed. Meeting another servant, she said, "Have the ladies done tea yet?" but before she could be answered, the Countess came out of Mrs. Dawson's boudoir.

"I was just coming down to look for your ladyship," said Piper, glibly, but not without a guilty feeling at her heart.

"Coming to look for me, Piper?"

"To ask your ladyship for the key of the dressing-room. The door's locked and I can't get in."

"My dressing-room door locked! What do you mean?"

"I just ran down stairs to the housekeeper's room to get a bit of camphor for my hollow tooth," replied the ready-tongued Piper. "I was half distracted with face-ache, my lady. I had to wait while Mrs. Drabble found the camphor, though I couldn't have been away more than five minutes, but when I got back upstairs I found the dressing-room door locked, and nobody answered when I knocked."

"What became of my jewel-case while you were away from the room?"

"I left it unlocked on the dressing-table ready for your ladyship," answered Piper, more timidly than she had yet spoken.

"You left my jewel-case on the dressing-table while you went down stairs, and did not even take the precaution to lock the door after you!" said the Countess, in a tone of high displeasure. "What unpardonable carelessness!"

"I am very sorry, my lady," returned Piper humbly, for she was really alarmed at the responsibility she had incurred by leaving the room. "But no doubt the jewel-case is quite safe."

"Safe!" echoed the Countess, turning cold at the bare idea of its being anything else. "What do you mean, Piper? You really deserve a month's warning for such imprudence."

They had been slowly ascending the stairs as they talked, and had reached the dressing-room by this time. Without further parley her ladyship turned the handle, but only to find that the door was really locked. Then she knocked and said, "James, are you there?" but there came no response.

Piper meanwhile had tried the two other doors and found that they also were still locked. "This is Ennerdale's doing," said the Countess to herself. "He has found my jewel-case on the table, as Piper left it, and has locked the doors by way of teaching us to be more careful in future." She was seriously annoyed. Nothing was more vexing to her than to be found fault with by her husband,

and she knew that in the present case he would not hold her blameless. He would say that she ought to have given Piper a special caution not to leave the room while the jewel-case was about.

"See whether you can find Lord Ennerdale," she said to Piper, "and say that I should like to see him as quickly as possible."

Away went Piper in fear and trembling. There was only one man in the world of whom she stood in awe, and that man was the Earl. She found him in the library alone, immersed in some rare folio, and delivered her message. He answered her with a nod—being a man of few words—and shutting up his book at once, proceeded up stairs in a leisurely way, whistling under his breath, and jingling the loose change in his pocket as he went. Piper followed, quaking at heart.

The Earl found his wife with a shawl thrown round her, pacing the cold corridor. "I want to get into my dressing-room," she said to him, with a little impatience in her tone. "Be good enough to open the door. I shall hardly be dressed in time for dinner."

The Earl looked at her and tugged at his whiskers.

"Open the door of your dressing-room?" he said. "And pray what is the matter with the door that I should be fetched all the way from the library to open it?"

"As if you did not know! It is locked, of course, as is also the bed-room door and that of your dressing-room. But do make haste and open it. Of course it was excessively careless of Piper to leave the room while my jewel-case was in it, and I am ——"

"What!" almost shouted the Earl. "Your jewel-case left in the room and the doors found locked! Then, as sure as you live, it has been stolen!"

"But it was you who locked the door, was it not?" asked the Countess, with a sudden tremor in her voice.

The Earl made no answer in words, but dashing into the nearest bed-room that was open, he issued therefrom next moment, poker in hand. Using this implement as a lever, for insertion between the door and the jamb, the Earl, after half a dozen powerful wrenches, contrived to burst open the door of his wife's dressing-room. He rushed in, followed by the Countess, and, at a more modest distance, by Piper. The tale told itself in a moment. One of the two windows was wide open. The candles in the sconces were all blown out save one. An overturned chair, a shattered vase, and Lady Ennerdale's jewel-case nowhere to be seen.

"Robbed, by Jove! Just as I thought," cried the Earl with a groan. For the first time in her life Lady Ennerdale fainted. Her husband was just in time to catch her, or she would have fallen. Piper showed symptoms of coming hysterics.

"Hold your tongue, you idiot!" cried the Earl sternly, "and attend to your mistress. It is all through your carelessness that this has happened."

While Piper attended to the Countess, the Earl lighted another

candle and explored the two remaining rooms. But before doing this he took a glance at the open window. He had made up his mind that he should find a ladder outside, and he did find one. The mode by which the thief or thieves had obtained ingress to the room was at once apparent.

The three doors were locked on the inside, and the keys of two of them were still in the locks. The third key was afterwards found on the carpet. At a cursory glance no further property than the jewel-case seemed to be missing, a fact which subsequent examination fully confirmed. In the Earl's dressing-room was a large and heavy travelling-trunk of peculiarly substantial make. Stooping down to examine this, his lordship was startled to see certain marks round the lock which plainly indicated that someone had been trying to force it. The Earl turned pale as he examined the marks by the aid of his candle. "How fortunate that they did not succeed in breaking it open," he exclaimed under his breath.

There was a writing-table close by, which the Earl next proceeded to examine. The lock of this had been violently forced, but the contents, being nothing but letters and documents, had not been interfered with. An Indian cabinet of rare workmanship, which stood on a table in the bed-room, had also been broken open, but nothing taken out of it. Money or jewellery had evidently been the object of the thieves' quest, but not finding either, they had declined to burden themselves with any meaner spoil, and contenting themselves with the case which contained the diamond necklace, the emerald bracelet, and a few other articles, they had decamped as quietly as they had come. It was most fortunate that the other case, in which was the Countess's own collection of jewels, was still in Mr. Dawson's strong-room, or that also would undoubtedly have been taken.

While the Earl was looking about in much perturbation of spirit, his eye was caught by some strange object on the floor. He stooped and picked it up. It proved to be a chisel—the implement, undoubtedly, with which the writing-desk and the Indian cabinet had been forced open, and which had tested the strength of the Earl's travelling-trunk.

"It's all a mystery. I was never more puzzled in my life," said the Earl to himself, as he put the chisel in his pocket and went back to his wife's dressing-room. "Who on earth can have done it?"

And yet there seemed nothing about the affair that need have puzzled his lordship. What could be more admirably simple than the way the robbery had been planned and carried out. A ladder, a window, an empty room, a little box that a man might stow away in his great-coat pocket. Of a surety there was nothing mysterious in all this.

Her ladyship was lying on the sofa, pale but conscious, when her husband entered the dressing-room.

"Go downstairs and ask Mr. Dawson to be good enough to step up and see me," said the Earl to Piper as he shut the window which the thieves had left open; "and see that, at present, you don't say a word to anyone about the robbery."

"Can you ever forgive me, James?" asked the Countess timidly from the sofa.

"I suppose I shall have to try to do so," answered the Earl a little grimly.

"I shall never forgive myself," said the Countess with tears in her voice. To this her husband made no response. With the assistance of his double eye-glass he was examining the marks left by a large and dirty boot on the chintz covering of a chair near the window.

"Don't you think, dear, that there's any chance of our recovering the—the stolen property?" asked the Countess, after a pause.

"Not the remotest, I should say," was the sententious answer.

"But what shall I do?" returned Lady Ennerdale in distress. "My best jewels are gone—I have nothing left to wear."

The Countess was discouraged and buried her face in the pillows. If he would but have talked to her! There would have been some consolation in that, however slight. She never felt so near disliking her husband as when he withdrew himself into himself—"just as if he were a snail," as the Countess sometimes said—and would not talk to her, would hardly even answer her questions. But it was not often that he treated her thus. Perhaps the very rarity of such treatment made her feel it all the more when she had to submit to it.

Mr. Dawson came tramping up stairs as though he were tramping over one of his own turnip fields. A heavy man, with a red, good-humoured face and long sandy whiskers—a modern bucolic Englishman. Three minutes sufficed to put him in possession of the facts of the case so far as they were known.

"Send for the police without a minute's delay," was his first oracular utterance, and he rang the bell as he spoke. "Capital fellow, Baylis, our head constable at Crampton. We'll have the county scoured from end to end before we're six hours older. Every tramp, vagabond, and suspicious character shall be popped into the lock-up and made to prove where he was and what he was about this evening." He spoke in such loud, cheerful, confident tones that his words diffused quite a warm glow of hope through the Countess's chilled heart.

"And do you really think, Mr. Dawson, that we shall recover the necklace?" she asked in anxious tones.

"I'm sure I hope so, my dear lady. I don't see why we shouldn't. These clever rogues generally overreach themselves in one way or another, and as I said before, Baylis is an uncommonly sharp fellow." Then to a servant who had answered his ring: "Tell Tompkins to take the dogcart, drive over to Crampton, and bring back Baylis, the

head constable. He's not to lose a minute. I shall expect him back in an hour and a half from now."

Turning to the Earl, Mr. Dawson added: "If you'll allow me, my dear Ennerdale, I'll take this inquiry entirely into my own hands."

"I wish you would," said the Earl. "It's altogether out of my line, as you know." Then he handed to his host the chisel which he had picked up.

"The ladder they no doubt got from the tool-house," said Mr. Dawson. "There would be no difficulty about that. But the fact of their making your wife's dressing-room their point of attack, and walking off with her jewel-case and nothing else, would seem to indicate that the thieves knew quite well what they were about. In fact, there can be no doubt that they knew Lady Ennerdale had brought her diamonds with her, and knew equally well which was the likeliest place to find them. Clever rogues!"

Lady Ennerdale did not go down to dinner that evening, but the Earl ate his mutton and played his rubber afterwards as quietly as if nothing had happened. He had been more or less of a philosopher all his life. If the jewels were gone, he argued, it would only make the loss worse by worrying about it. A happy faculty, perhaps, that many of us might envy; but one that, carried to extreme, might lead to indolent inaction.

"You see, dear, Ennerdale is such a philosopher," said the Countess to Mrs. Nugent Dawson, who had gone up stairs to sit with her friend and administer such comfort as might be possible under the circumstances. "I sometimes wonder whether he has any nerves at all. I believe if an earthquake were to take place his first care would be to have his beloved blue-books dug out of the ruins. I wish I could be a philosopher," added the poor Countess with a sigh.

Previously to this the Ennerdales had been accommodated with another suite of rooms, their old ones being given over for a time to the police. Baylis, accompanied by Mr. Dawson, who transformed himself into a detective for the time being and quite enjoyed the assumption, went thoroughly into the affair. They tramped up stairs and down, they scoured the gardens and shrubbery, they wagged their heads solemnly, they whispered confidentially to each other, although nobody was by, and now and then they tempered the keenness of the December weather with seasonable potations of whiskey toddy. All night long, after he had gone to bed thoroughly fagged out, Mr. Nugent Dawson, like the Squire of Locksley Hall, hunted in his dreams, only it was burglars and not foxes that he chased through the realms of sleep.

When Lord Ennerdale retired for the night he found his wife asleep, her pillow wet with tears. His face softened as he looked at her. Stooping, he touched her cheek softly with his lips. The action awoke her. She grasped one of his hands in both hers. "Oh!

James, what shall I do?" she cried, and the tears trembled afresh on her eyelids.

"Do, Mamie? It seems to me that the best thing you can do is to go to sleep again." He so seldom called her by her pet name that she felt herself half forgiven already.

"I am so very sorry ——" she began.

"Not another word to-night, an' thou lovest me," said the Earl, as he laid a finger lightly on her lips. "It's no use crying over spilt milk. The diamonds are gone, more's the pity, but all the fretting in the world won't bring them back."

"How I wish, darling, I could be a philosopher like you."

The Earl's only reply was a shrug of the shoulders.

Next day, which was Christmas Day, some half-dozen tramps were arrested at different places on suspicion of being implicated in the burglary at Fairmead. The following day saw all of them released but one. In the pockets of the one in question were found a set of skeleton keys. He had been seen loafing about for two or three days previously, drinking at this and the other low public-house, but never far away from Fairmead. In addition to all this, the account he gave of his comings and goings on the evening of the burglary was anything but satisfactory. He was remanded on suspicion, and Mr. Nugent Dawson and Lord Ennerdale were at once communicated with.

Next morning the two gentlemen drove over to the justice-room at Crampton. "An ill-conditioned cur as one would see in a day's march," was Mr. Dawson's comment as the prisoner was brought in.

"We should all have a hangdog look if we hadn't been shaved for a week and had an ugly scar running right across one cheek, as that fellow has," said the Earl. "He's not the sort of man, to my mind, who would be likely to plan and carry out such a robbery as ours."

The case against the prisoner was so suspicious that the magistrate remanded him for a week in order to give the police time to make further inquiries respecting his antecedents. At the end of the week nothing further had been elicited tending to criminate him. The grave fact still remained that a set of skeleton keys had been found in his possession, but it could not be shown that he was in any way mixed up with the robbery at Fairmead. The magistrate made up his mind to commit him for a month as a rogue and vagabond. "Poor devil! why not let him go?" said Lord Ennerdale, who was seated on the bench.

"Do you really mean it?" asked the magistrate, in surprise.

"I do. I shall take it as a favour if you will let him go scot free. There is no case against him, and he has suffered nine days' imprisonment already. Surely a sufficient punishment for being taken up on suspicion."

Accordingly the prisoner was discharged with a caution to get away from the neighbourhood as quickly as possible.

"Had not Lord Ennerdale so kindly interceded for you, you would certainly have been committed for a month," were the magistrate's parting words.

As Mr. Dawson and the Earl were driving back to Fairmead they overtook their quondam prisoner, who was trudging wearily along the high road, leaving Crampton behind him. Mr. Dawson reined up his horse for a moment. "Hi! you fellow," he called out. "Don't let your face be seen in these parts again, or you won't get off so easily next time."

The Earl said nothing, but tossed the man a sovereign. He caught it dexterously, and put it into his pocket. "Thank you heartily, my lord," he said, carrying a finger to his forehead. "If we had a few more like you there wouldn't be half so many thieves in the world."

"Then you admit that you are a thief?" said Mr. Dawson drily.

"Whatever I am," said the man, "I wish I may never see the sun set again if it was me as took the lady's diamonds!"

"Gammon!" ejaculated Mr. Dawson, contemptuously, as he flicked his horse with the whip, and in another minute the man was left far behind.

Mr. Dawson preserved a sulky silence the rest of the way home. He was annoyed with the Earl for what he called his "sentimental tomfoolery." Then he consoled himself by saying, "But Ennerdale always was noted for his eccentricities, and this is only one more added to the number."

The Ennerdale robbery was a nine days' wonder, as such affairs always are, and formed material for a paragraph in every newspaper in the kingdom. The Earl was persuaded into offering a large reward, but nothing came of it; and as he had said from the first that nothing would come of it, he could hardly be disappointed. Such ladies of the Countess's acquaintance as had diamond necklaces of their own, sympathized deeply with her in her loss, but whether they were really sorry at heart was best known to themselves. The Countess, knowing what great store her husband had set by the family jewels, sometimes felt doubtful whether he had really forgiven her. Although he hardly ever alluded to the subject, she often fancied that there was a shade of coldness in his manner towards her, such as she had never noticed before. Still, it might be nothing more than fancy on her part, but she worried herself all the more in secret because she was not quite positive as to its existence.

Time went on, bringing with it another Christmas in due course. On Christmas Eve, Lord and Lady Ennerdale were dining by themselves at their house in London. They had finished a round of country visits only two days previously, and were glad to be alone for a little while.

"Do you remember what happened this night a year ago?" asked the Earl, when the servants had left the room.

"Can I ever forget it? Never a day passes, or a night either for that matter, but what I mourn for my poor lost necklace."

"Should you not like another one?"

"Yes—and No."

"Explain yourself."

"Show me the woman who would not like to have a diamond necklace. But if I had another I should be for ever worrying myself about its safety. I should never feel happy except when it was locked up at your bankers'."

"When I called in at Hunt and Roskell's this afternoon they showed me such a lovely necklace."

"Ah!"

"Your mouth would have watered had you seen it. They only wanted six thousand guineas for it."

"Only, James! Who would be mad enough to spend six thousand guineas on a necklace?"

"Plenty of people. Why, the one that you lost—or rather the one that was stolen from you—was worth considerably more than that."

"And then it was a family jewel, which made it still more valuable," said the Countess, with a sigh.

"Precisely so," said the Earl, drily. He peeled himself a walnut before he spoke again. His wife sat gazing sadly into the fire.

"Now listen to me," said the Earl. "You know that I have been saving up for some time past in order that I might buy a certain piece of land which is sure to come to the hammer when poor old Twenty-man dies—and the doctors gave him up several weeks ago. But I have been thinking that as it must be very annoying to you to have no necklace to wear, and as Hunt's people have such a magnificent sample on sale, I could not do better than invest six thousand guineas of my savings in the purchase of it. After all, you know, I don't see why I need bother about that land. It was only a little fancy of mine that I should like to have it. Nothing more."

For a minute the Countess sat without speaking. Then she said, "You shall make no such sacrifice for me, James. I have made up my mind never to wear another diamond necklace as long as I live, so you need never offer to buy one for me."

"Think twice before you decide."

"I have thought."

"Is that your ultimatum?"

"It is—most emphatically." Then she rose and went round to where her husband was sitting, and putting her arms round his neck, she stooped and kissed him. "You are too good to me. I don't deserve so much kindness," she murmured; and the Earl felt a tear on his forehead.

He peeled another walnut and ate it in silence. Then he rose. "Excuse my leaving you," he said. "I shall be back in three minutes."

Before the three minutes had expired he was back again. The Countess, sitting in a dejected attitude before the fire, did not look up as he entered. He crossed the room to her and bent over the back of her chair. "You said just now that you would never wear a diamond necklace again. Will you refuse to wear this one?"

She looked up, startled. There was a moment's silence, and then she gave vent to an inarticulate cry of surprise and delight. She could hardly credit the evidence of her eyes. There, before her, in the old, worn, well-remembered case, she saw the diamond necklace and the emerald bracelet of which she had been robbed a year ago that night.

"Oh, my darling, what does it all mean?" she contrived to gasp out.

"It means that your jewels have come back to you as mysteriously as they went. Let us hope that you will know how to take better care of them in time to come."

"Then the thieves have been caught, and ——"

"The thief stands before you. I am that felonious individual."

"You, James? Oh!"

"Yes, I." Taking the necklace out of its case, he clasped it round his wife's neck, then he drew up a chair and sat down opposite to her. "You are dying for an explanation?" he said.

"I am indeed." She could not resist standing up and glancing at herself for a moment in the glass over the chimney-piece. Then she sat down again with a sigh of supreme satisfaction.

"After I had finished my letters that evening," began the Earl, "I went into your dressing-room to ask you a question. You were not there."

"I had gone down to Mrs. Dawson for a cup of tea," interrupted Lady Ennerdale.

"Very probably, my dear," returned the Earl drily. "As I say, you were not there; neither was Piper, but on the dressing-table was your jewel-case ready for anyone to pocket who might choose to do so. To say that I was not annoyed would not be to state the truth. All at once it came into my head that I would try to commit an amateur burglary and carry off the casket in order to prove to you how easily it might have been stolen in reality. While out in the morning, I had noticed a ladder resting against a wall near the tool-house which it seemed to me would answer my purpose. When I got out into the shrubbery not a creature was about. The night was a very cold one and a light snow was falling. Five minutes later I had climbed the ladder, pushed open the window of your dressing-room, and had made myself master of your jewel-case. Nothing could be more easy."

"Good gracious! James, however dared you do such a thing?"

"Having got possession of the case, I walked through the bed-room into my own dressing-room, unlocked my big travelling-trunk, popped the case into it, relocked the trunk, and went back by the way I came, that is to say, through the window and down the ladder. I was

quietly chuckling to myself over your discomfiture when Piper found me in the library and told me that you wanted me."

"What an adventure! What a capital professional burglar you would make! You must have been changed at nurse, dear," said the Countess. The Earl laughed. "It is my turn to be angry at having such a trick played off upon me, and I am not quite sure yet that I shall forgive you," continued her ladyship.

"Wait till you have heard all."

"How absurd of you to lock the doors and give yourself the trouble of forcing an entrance."

"It was not I who locked the doors. It was not I who forced open the Indian casket, or the writing-table, or who tried to break into my travelling-trunk. I left no chisel on the floor, nor was that the mark of my boot on the chintz covering of the chair near the window."

The Countess was staring at him with parted lips and frightened eyes. "If you did not do these things, who was it that did them?"

"A man, a professional burglar, who found his way into the room a few minutes after I had left it, with the full intention of stealing your diamond necklace. He was baulked in the attempt, but had I not fortunately been first in the field, and taken possession of the case, you would certainly never have set eyes on it again."

"But how did you find out this?"

"On one of the men who was taken up on suspicion was found a bunch of skeleton keys. This of itself was very suspicious, but nothing further could be traced to connect him with the supposed burglary. Had I not interfered in his behalf, Colonel Rawson would have given him a month's imprisonment as a rogue and vagabond; but knowing well he was not the thief, I saw no reason why he should be thus punished. Meeting him accidentally afterwards, I gave him a sovereign. It would seem that the fellow did not forget what I had done for him. About three months ago he got into some more serious difficulty, and then he wrote me a rude sort of epistle in which he told me that he had followed us down from London to Fairmead fully intending to steal the necklace. That he had obtained access to your dressing-room by means of the ladder so conveniently placed there, but that, to his intense disgust, no jewel-case was to be found. 'It seems to me that some one had been there afore me,' added my friend in conclusion. That 'some one,' as you know already, was myself."

"James," said Lady Ennerdale, humbly, "you have indeed rendered me a service and taught me a lesson. If ever I am careless again, I shall deserve a greater punishment than this has been to me."

"I am not afraid, my love," replied the Earl, kissing his wife. "As you say, it has been a lesson to you, and I see that you have learnt it well."

THE FULNESS OF THE WORLD.

BY THE REV. T. S. CUNNINGHAM.

I.

He wandered on the shining sands—
 The shining sands, when tides were low,
 What time the rising sun had set
 The white cliffs all aglow.
 He looked away, and yet away,
 Beyond the shingle bordered bar,
 To where the ships, the white-sailed ships,
 Lay all becalmed afar.
 And chequered lights and shadows soft
 Touched purple moor and far-off hill,
 That mellowed on the golden fields,
 On barn, and croft, and mill.
 The swishing of the busy scythe,
 And hum of voices, melt and merge
 In numberless uncertain sounds,
 To music with the surge.
 And past him, fluttered up and down,
 A butterfly, striped black and red,
 A glinting, glancing, careless thing—
 "The world is full of Life," he said.

II.

He wandered through the noisy streets—
 The noisy streets, so cold and grim,
 Where yellow lights, and yellow fog,
 Made darkness still more dim.
 He listened to the ceaseless strife ;
 The voice alike of young and old ;
 Where all things precious, all things vile,
 At bid, were bought and sold.
 A dream of faces passed him by,
 In broad highway, and narrow lane,
 Until the breathless tumult seemed
 One everlasting pain !
 On through the mists, and through the chill,
 With draggled black, and shouting train,
 The parish coffin hurried past,
 Into the sooty rain !

A soul gone forth ! a body laid
Mid dusty nettles, rank and tall :
Six feet of clay, a few rough boards—
Hid and forgot of all !
What of the restless up and down ?—
The joy—the sin—the toil for bread ?
The bitter work of heart and brain ?—
“ The world is full of Death,” he said.

III.

He wandered down a forest path—
A forest path where shadows fall—
And round his way the tangled trees
Encircled, like a wall.
He looked to right, he looked to left,
Where rain-soaked mouldered leaves were seen,
Until there peered from out the wreck
A primrose, golden-green :
A token of the by-and-by—
New promise, out of old decay,
The present linking, one with one,
Future and past away.
The rugged blackthorn hedge was thick
With shining buds of pearly round,
And hazel tassels, in the brakes,
Were scattered on the ground.
Still hung forlorn the broken nests,
Which winter winds had spared till now ;
But new bird-builders toiled and wrought
In bush, and branch, and bough.
Not swift of working, but most sure,
Both life, and death, and good, and ill,
By constant interchange of place,
Purpose most high fulfil.
Wisdom is great ! Yet who hath taught
Her wisdom ? Who hath set in tune
This constant order of the earth ?
After December, June ?
Who, like the sweet musician throned
Behind the organ's many keys,
With here and there a magic touch
Weaveth great symphonies ?
Who, without fault of human flaw,
Hath order, both for quick and dead ?
A master-worker, wise and strong !—
“ The world is full of God !” he said.

MADAME DE STAEL.

IN the year 1766 there was joy one day in the house of M. Necker, the rising young man who was beginning to make such a mark for himself in political life, for a little daughter had been born to him ; but it was a sober, measured joy, for the young mother was one of the most strict followers of the severe sect of Calvinists. The child, before she could well speak plainly, was remarkable for sharp, piquant little sayings, which set bonnes and lady visitors in a roar, and the wondrously expressive pantomime which accompanied her talk, added yet a further and most irresistible charm to her many graceful whims and conceits.

Louise's first toy—a toy, too, of her own special imagining and invention—caused her Calvinist mother no small exercising of mind. One or two of the servants had paid stolen visits to the play-house, and had whispered much together in the child's hearing about its glittering wonders. Mademoiselle Louise knew well enough that she should never be permitted by her mother to go to such a place of amusement, but why should she not have a theatre of her own? The question went whirling hither and thither through her restless young mind, until it brought forth unexpected fruit.

One morning the little lady begged an old box of her *bonne*, and that much-enduring personage was most agreeably surprised to find how entirely this seemingly insignificant present occupied, in some strange, mysterious way, all the energies of her lively, quicksilver-like charge. What was her astonishment when she found the box transformed into a miniature stage, with a few coloured prints for scenery. On these boards her dolls were made dexterously to perform their entries and exits, the dramatic company was strengthened by several skilfully cut-out and painted paper figures, the dialogue was supplied by the young manageress herself, who now went off into long ripples of laughter at her own wit, and now sobbed passionately behind her pinafore at her own pathos.

In all the April sorrows of her childhood, and all its rainbow-tinted joys, little Louise had one unfailingly sympathizing friend, one untiring playfellow ; this was her father. M. Necker was a singularly sweet-tempered, cheery-natured man, and his little daughter was not slow to find out this. Her father's knee was a sure haven of safety to which she could fly whenever the wrath of mother, aunt, or governess pursued her with Juno-like persistency. Her father's ear was always a willing receptacle for every new fairy fancy. With her small arms clasped around that well-loved neck, with her head nestling on that trusted breast, she felt as if she might bid defiance to the whole world. Besides, this strong affection for her father was to prove no

feeling which was to slip away out of Louise Necker's heart and life. As she grew from girl to woman, and fresh and closer ties formed themselves around her, it was to tinge in a certain way her whole story, and we still find notes of it in "*Corinne*," where Oswald laments his father's loss.

One of the ways in which Louise showed, in her childhood, her devoted love for her father was, to say the least, a very extraordinary and characteristic one for a girl of her age. This little incident took place when she was about ten, and as it calls up before us an amusing picture out of the panorama of her varied life, we will pause to gaze for a moment at it.

There are brilliant lights this evening, and the ring of many voices in the salon. Madame Necker is giving a party. The house of the Neckers is famous throughout all Paris for the number of men of wit and intellect whom it often gathers beneath its roof in its frequent reunions. To-night, to judge by the flash of bright intelligence in every face, by the sparkles of airy fun which fly from lip to lip, by the deep, thoughtful earnestness in the eyes of some of the guests, who, a little apart from the gayer throng, are speaking of high, grave themes in knots of two or three together, there must be more men of mark than usual here.

By-and-by there is a slight stir at the door of the room, many eyes are turned towards it with a kindly light in them, many a playful word is on each lip, and all this greets a small, daintily-dressed figure which comes dancing up the salon. The gentlemen try to make her stop to exchange a few saucy words with them, the ladies stretch out their arms to draw her on to their laps; but to-night, very contrary to her usual custom, the young lady heeds none of their blandishments; there is a set, intent look on her face, and she is evidently pre-occupied, and completely filled with some strong, ruling idea. Her mother tries to get her to take her usual seat on a stool at her feet, but quickly seeing that the little maiden is in no flexible mood, desists, not wishing for a scene before company. On goes the girl through rows of gleaming silks and waving fans, through long lines of powdered gentlemen; until she reaches a corner, where her father sits engaged in absorbing talk with a short, dark man, who speaks French with a strong, rather harsh, foreign accent, and whose face is all ablaze with keen, intellectual fire; yet, though that face is so clever, we do not exactly like it, and we feel we could never love it. There is something uncomfortable in the steel-like glitter of the eyes, and the sarcastic smile which flickers round the mouth; somehow it makes us think of a fine polished Toledo blade. Genial-looking Monsieur Necker, however, seems to take great pleasure in this gentleman's society, and the pair appear to understand each other.

When little Louise draws near, the two men cease their serious talk, the guest begins a merry, fantastic tale for her edification, her father calls her with many a loving, playful wile to his side, but the

child seems in no humour for fun of any sort this evening; she has something far too grave in hand, something about which no joke must be made. Her father and his friend cast amused, wondering glances at each other, and cannot at all guess what is coming next. But whatever strange, impossible conjectures they may have made on the subject, they are most completely outdone by the words which now come from Mademoiselle Louise's lips. She places herself between the two gentlemen with a grand, majestic air, and turning to the guest, says solemnly, while she fixes her eyes steadfastly on his face:

"Monsieur Gibbon, will you consent to a betrothal taking place at once between yourself and me? Because, you see, if I were to marry you, you would stay in France, and never go back to England, and then my father would always enjoy the pleasure of your conversation, in which he so delights, and I should know that I had obtained it for him."

If all things are considered, it was surely well for the young lady that she was ten instead of twenty when she made this proposal to the author of "*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*."

As Louise Necker grew into early girlhood, she began to show something of the vast, strong capacities for which her mind was afterwards so distinguished; she displayed a decided aptitude for those deeper studies which are, in general, distasteful to the young female brain, and handled them as easily as most girls do their crochet needles. She delighted in looking into the history of nations, and in reading their annals by a light evolved by herself out of their past; her imagination, too, kept pace with her reason, and she revelled in the poetry of all lands, for she was a clever linguist. Her pen soon was busy with something besides letter-writing, though even her parents hardly knew anything of what she was about; until, one day, they and several of their intimate, learned friends were literally struck dumb by the girl of fifteen bringing them to read a treatise on the laws of her country.

At eighteen, Mademoiselle Necker's brilliant conversational powers were fully developed, and began to show themselves in society. She talked about everything; about literature, religion, science, social troubles, politics; sometimes rather wide of the mark, it is true, but always with brightness and originality. The worst of it was, however, that in those days, in France, young ladies of position did not talk in public at all. Even her father began to be a little frightened at the phenomenon which his house had produced, radiant phenomenon though it was, and to look about for some safe, responsible man, who would be willing to take the shining wonder out of his hands, and to hold it in secure keeping.

The Swedish ambassador at the French Court was a certain Baron de Stael. He was middle-aged, and a Protestant, and well-endowed as to worldly goods; his intellect was not exactly as bright as a northern aurora borealis, but his private daily life was as steady-going as a

French diligence. He was just the sort of son-in-law Monsieur and Madame Necker wanted, and he showed a decided admiration and liking for their daughter. Through the influence of Queen Marie Antoinette, with whom Monsieur Necker was at this time something of a favourite, a marriage was arranged, and before she well knew what was happening to her, Louise found herself Madame de Stael.

The girl was not the least in love with her husband, but then it was the fate of every girl in France of her rank to be married without love; so she resigned herself to her destiny without feeling that there was much to complain of in it. The marriage cannot be said to have been an unhappy one, though the pair were often separated for long periods, and though they knew nothing of what we call in England domestic, home life. Two children, a son and a daughter, were given to bless it, and no doubt Madame de Stael learned, as years went on, to feel a sincere, warm esteem for her husband. In after life, however, Madame de Stael came to express a strong disapproval of the loveless character of French marriages in general, in high life. She would say, with eager, tender earnestness, that her own daughter should marry for love, and for nothing else; and when Mademoiselle de Stael reached years of discretion, she fully obeyed her mother's wishes in this respect in her choice of the young Duc de Broglie.

But to return to Madame de Stael in the first days of her married life. She now enjoyed far more freedom than she had ever done before. She had a house of her own, where she could gather round her all the friends she loved best; she could talk as much as she pleased, because her being a married woman made all the difference; she was near her beloved father, and could see him every day. Her brain and her pen were always busy. Altogether this was perhaps one of the calmest, happiest periods of her life. Probably her most uncomfortable experience at this time was when she had to attend at Court, as she had occasionally to do. Display of this kind never suited her; her irregular features had nothing of the sort of beauty which looks well in a State pageant, though her hand and arm are said to have been statuesquely perfect. Her whole figure was too strongly developed for her to move with much grace; she forgot, amid some grand wave of thought which came rushing over her, minute forms which she ought to have observed, and in the confusion consequent on such mistakes, with the eyes of many grand dames looking daggers at her, caught her feet in her train as she backed out of the presence of Royalty, or tore her rich lace in the crowd in the antechamber. The whole charm of her appearance always lay in her wondrous mobility of expression while she talked, and in the radiant splendour, now flashing lightning-like, now glowing soft as summer moonlight, of her dark, lustrous eyes. But loveliness of this kind did not shine much in the automaton drill which composed the ponderous gilded etiquette of the French court life.

When the first warning trumpet-note, which foretold the coming

revolution, rang through France, Madame de Stael, in common with many other great, liberal-minded men and women, who foresaw nothing of the horrors that were at hand, greeted it with joy. Her generous nature was always on the side of the weak and oppressed, and she thought a dawn of high and noble things for the common people was at hand. Her father shared, in a great measure, her views, and she had the triumph of seeing him placed at the head of public affairs as Prime Minister. But before long the spirit which Necker had helped to raise proved too strong for him to control; the fickle mob, who had burnt incense to him yesterday, now thronged round his door with wild threats on their lips, and his only hope for his life was secret and speedy flight. Then husband, children, political opinions, were forgotten and abandoned by Madame de Stael, and in such frantic haste that she had not time to change the evening dress she had on at the moment, she accompanied her father into exile. It seemed to her that that adored life would be safer if she were near to shield it, if needful, with her own.

The father and daughter went into Switzerland, and took up their abode at Coppet, on the shores of the Lake of Geneva. There they led a busy yet tranquil existence, filled with much reading and writing, and by the visits of many friends, who, refugees like themselves, came to settle near them. It was at this time her first great work of fiction, "Delphine," was published, and found at once a wide circulation. During the whole of her residence at Coppet, Madame de Stael's heart and mind turned, in grief and longing, towards her distracted country. Once, even, before the Reign of Terror was over, she returned for awhile to Paris, where, having some influence with a few of the revolutionary leaders, she put her own life in danger, and showed the most intrepid courage in her efforts to save men and women from the guillotine.

When the star of Napoleon began to rise, Madame de Stael greeted it with a hymn of glad homage, for its splendour dazzled her; she hastened to France, and took up her residence once more in Paris. As soon, however, as she perceived what false glitter there was in that radiance, and discovered that selfish tyranny and aggrandisement were the one rule of her hero's life, she changed her note. Bonaparte quickly found out her inimical feelings towards him, and the First Consul and the authoress of "Delphine" indulged in language about each other which was more remarkable for strength of expression than for elegance. At length the conqueror of a thousand fields began to be thoroughly afraid of this woman; her scathing wit lashed him wherever he turned. He felt she was indeed his mistress in a war of words, so he took summary and arbitrary revenge, and banished her from Paris, forbidding her to come within so many leagues of the capital.

But even in the quiet country retreat which now sheltered her, she knew she was not safe from the mighty wrath of Napoleon. Any

hour an order of arrest might come. One of her most devoted friends and admirers, M. D'Anglie, used to watch every night beneath her window to be ready to warn her if danger was at hand. Her life was one long dread, and great though her grief was at having again to leave her beloved country, it was perhaps almost a relief to her when a further decree of Napoleon banished her from French ground altogether.

Madame de Stael's life was now for several years one long history of wandering from one land to another. Now we find her in England, competing successfully in brilliancy of talk with Burke and Sheridan, taking Fanny Burney's heart by storm, and flirting, in somewhat too sentimental a way, perhaps, with the handsome young refugee, the Comte de Narbonne. Next she was in Germany, where Goethe and Schiller, unused as they were to much conversational power in German ladies, were a good deal exercised by her tongue, and where she published one of her best known books, "*L'Allemagne*." By-and-by she was in Berlin, where a great sorrow fell upon her in the news of her father's death. Her sorrow for that loss lasted as long as her own life, and, go where she might, Necker's picture always hung at her bedside.

In order to distract her mind, in some measure, from this great, overwhelming blow, she took a journey into Italy. There her imagination was fired with all she saw and heard, and she wrote "*Corinne*." We have no space here to dwell on this world-famed novel. It is a real prose poem, and its end and aim, on the whole, are noble.

Go where she might, and be employed as she might, one vast, sickening, yearning feeling always lay at the bottom of Madame de Stael's soul, muffling each note of praise, casting a grey cloud over each scene, however bright: this was her longing after her country, for her heart was French to the very core. Two or three times Napoleon's enmity against her slumbered so far that she gained admission, for a short time, into France; but in a few weeks her rebellious, keen pen and tongue were sure to say or write something which called forth against her a fresh decree of exile. Once she was told by some mediating friend that if she would write a poem to celebrate the birth of the little King of Rome, which had just then taken place, she would find her way speedily into Bonaparte's favour; but her only remark on this proposal was, "I don't see what I can say, except that I wish the child a good nurse." We can fancy that when this reply was reported at the Imperial Court it was not exactly received with smiles.

The Baron de Stael sometimes was with his wife, and sometimes they did not meet for long periods. Whenever he was near her, however, he always treated her with gentleness and consideration; he seems to have had real respect for her genius. When he died, which was while she was still comparatively young, she watched by him tenderly to the last, and her tears fell on his grave, as for a true and loyal friend.

Wherever she went Madame de Stael had a train of worshippers and admirers following her; wherever she went, her voice was raised on the side of the injured and oppressed. She felt keenly that, in her day, women did not enjoy sufficient freedom and sufficient educational advantages, and she spoke aloud in their cause; she stands out before us in middle-age a noble figure, ever ready to be the champion of the weak and to raise the fallen. Napoleon's mean hatred still went on pursuing her, and at length she was forbidden to go more than a certain number of miles beyond the shores of the Lake of Geneva, where, with memories of her father ringing in her heart, she had settled down.

When she was a few years past forty, Madame de Stael fell in with a certain young officer named de Rocca. She nursed him through a long illness, and such was still her charm that he became passionately in love with her. She responded to his feelings, and the pair were privately married. We may smile at the disparity of years in this union—de Rocca was but twenty-three; and yet there is something deeply pathetic in this great woman of genius, thus a few short years before her death, enjoying a gleam of sweet home peace.

Madame de Stael lived to see the fall of Napoleon. She died in France at the age of fifty-one, with her husband's hand in hers, leaving a name for posterity.

ALICE KING.

"ALL FOR LOVE."

THUS may the angels work: but how should we—
 Frail, selfish men, whom offer of reward
 Or fear of retribution's sharp-edged sword
 Cannot persuade to virtue, and keep free
 From sin's hard bondage—dream to serve our Lord
 For love alone? It surely may not be.
 Yet doth obedience well with love accord;
 And love still yields the truest fealty.
 The threat'ning heav'ns' loud crash and awful fire
 May call us to repentance; make us raise
 Affrighted eyes to the great Throne above:
 But not till the cold heart is drawn by love
 Will the whole life be one of acted praise;
 Our Father's smile sole gerdon we desire.

EMMA RHODES.

GWEN'S LOVER.

A SKETCH FROM LIFE.

PERHAPS you have never heard of Mr. David Owen of Carmarthenshire, but he was a great preacher among our people. He was a good man, and a kind of witty man too, but not very observant: or folks thought he was not, at any rate. Mrs. Owen was dead, and there was one girl, who lived at home with her father, and looked after his house; just the prettiest girl in all the neighbourhood; and good, too, I believe. Anyhow, the worst that could be said of her was that she was rather too much inclined to think a great deal of her own beauty.

Her name was Winifred; at least that is the English of it—for, you see, all the people about them spoke Welsh, and, of course, the names of the children were Welsh. But she was always called Gwen; and Gwen was thought much of both for her prettiness and because Mr. Owen was the minister, and so much respected.

There was a young man lived not far from Mr. Owen's who fell in love with Gwen, as a good many had done before him; and she for some reason or other—I am not wise in the ways of girls, and I don't know what it might be—was more good-natured to William Morgan than she had been to the others, and let him come about her more than anybody had done before. He was a handsome young fellow, the son of a farmer, and would have been a good enough match, if he had not been wild. But, as it was, all the neighbours knew that he was not at all fit for the minister's daughter, and very soon a great deal of talk arose about their being seen together, and his going to the house when Mr. Owen was likely to be out of the way.

At last, one of the neighbours got hold of Mr. Owen one day, and boldly attacked him upon the subject. "Keep an eye upon Gwen, Mr. Owen," said she, "and don't let her be encouraging that good-for-nothing." And then another came another day, and *he* said: "I hear that young vagabond is after Gwen, Mr. Owen." And when they had begun they went on, till Mr. Owen heard enough of Gwen and her sweetheart, you may be sure.

But the queer thing was that he seemed to take no notice of them all. He never answered, good or bad, when they spoke to him, and he never said a word to Gwen. Every other day the young man would be at the house, but he either came when Mr. Owen was away visiting, or else at night, when everybody but Gwen was gone to bed.

You see it used to be the custom, when two young people were courting, for the young man to go to see his sweetheart pretty late in the evening, so that they could have a little bit of talk comfortably by the kitchen fire after the others were gone away. The only thing

that was wrong about Gwen's lover was that she did not say anything to her father about his coming.

Well, one evening, when the nights were beginning to get pretty cold, Mr. Owen went up stairs as usual ; and whether he went to a little study he had, or whether he went to bed, Gwen did not know and did not care. She knew he would certainly not come down again that night ; and accordingly she opened the door and let in her sweetheart to spend an hour with her.

He was rather chilled with having waited longer than usual for her, so she drew up a settle with a high back close to the fire, and they sat down very comfortably and began to talk. I do not know what they talked about ; but so absorbing was the nature of their conversation, that they never heard or saw anything, till all of a sudden Mr. Owen looked over the top of the high back of the settle and said : " Good evening, my young friend ; I am very glad to see you."

Gwen jumped up in a great hurry ; William Morgan's arm remained stretched out for all the world as if it had been round her waist ; and Mr. Owen came round the settle to the hearth.

" It is a long time since I saw you," he went on, quite cheerfully and pleasantly ; " a long time ; and I should like very much to have a little talk with you. Will you come up stairs with me to my study ? I am very glad to see you here to-night."

The young man looked at Gwen, and Gwen looked at him, but they neither of them dared to say a word. Mr. Owen turned round and led the way up stairs, and as the young man followed him, Gwen gave him a little encouraging nod, just as much as to say, " I'll wait here for you till you come back."

Mr. Owen walked slowly up the stairs and into his study, and Gwen's sweetheart went after him, very much puzzled what was going to happen next. There was no fire upstairs, but there was a candle burning, and the big Bible open, with Mr. Owen's spectacles lying on it as if he had been reading ; and the big chair a little pushed back from the table, as he had pushed it when he got up and came down into the kitchen so unexpectedly.

" Take a seat," he said, giving the young man a chair. " It would be a great pleasure to me to see you here oftener, and to have a little reading together. But at any rate, we will take this opportunity. I'll read a chapter and expound a little as we go on."

" But, Mr. Owen," said the young man, " is not it getting late, please ?"

Mr. Owen was turning over the leaves meantime, and did not seem to hear him at all. It was a big old Bible, with a black binding and metal clasps, and with the Apocrypha in it. Perhaps you mayn't have read the Apocrypha—so I may as well tell you that it contains some very long chapters—particularly in the first book of Maccabees, where they are mostly over sixty verses. The second, for instance, is seventy, and the tenth eighty-nine verses long, and all about the wars of the Jews.

Mr. Owen turned and turned, till he got what he wanted, and then he settled himself in his chair and looked in the friendliest manner at Gwen's sweetheart.

"Here it is," he said. "We will begin with the second chapter of the book of Maccabees."

"Mr. Owen, I am sure it is getting late, sir," the young man ventured to say again. But Mr. Owen only answered, "The second chapter of first Maccabees," and began to read.

The light was not good, and the minister read slowly. When he came to a full stop, he leaned back in his chair, took off his spectacles, and expounded what he had read. Then he went on again as far as the next full stop, and then he expounded again.

The young man began to wonder how long it would take to get through the chapter, and he thought half an hour would surely do it. But, you see, he never came to chapel, and he had not the very least idea what Mr. Owen, when he liked, could do in the way of exposition; and time went on, and it was amazing how long they were in getting to the twentieth verse. Before they did that he had begun to wonder whether Gwen would wait for him. "Perhaps she will go to sleep by the fire," he thought to himself—"or will she get tired of being there alone, and go to bed?"

He kept listening for any movement in the house, and when they were nearly half through the chapter he heard a step on the stairs. "That's Gwen," he said to himself again, and it was all he could do to keep from saying it aloud. The step went on very slowly; it even stopped for a moment outside the study; but after that it went on again, and then there was the sound of a door shutting with a little bit of a bang, and he knew he should see no more of Gwen that night.

All the while Mr. Owen kept going on reading and explaining, and looking at the young man now and then to see that he was awake. And the clock struck for the second time, and then the candle began to burn low, and Gwen's sweetheart thought to himself: "It won't be long now till the candle goes out, and then he must stop." But presently, when he was giving the explanation of something that was harder than usual, Mr. Owen perceived that the candle was almost gone, so he just turned round in his chair and opened a cupboard that was within reach of his hand. There was another candle, all ready, and he brought it out and lighted it, and blew out the short bit without ever making a single gap in his exposition. And then the young man did not know *what* to think.

You see there was hardly another minister in Wales that was as clever at expounding as Mr. Owen. I have known him preach from one text for more than two hours, so of course when he had got seventy verses to talk about he could not be expected to be at any loss. He was used to sitting up at night, too, and did not seem to see how Gwen's sweetheart was getting so tired he could hardly keep upright on his chair.

But, however, there is an end to everything. The end of the chapter did come nearer and nearer slowly, and still the nearer it came the more Mr. Owen had to say. The clock struck again, and then a cock, that had made some mistake about the time, began to crow.

It was getting colder every minute, and there was not the least hope of the second candle burning out. Mr. Owen seemed as fresh as when he began, and just as friendly and cheerful. The room began to get hazy; the candle seemed to have a halo round it, like the one the moon has sometimes. Mr. Owen seemed to be a long way off, or talking through a blanket. Sometimes he went out of sight altogether, and sometimes he looked like Merlin, or some old enchanter sitting there saying spells out of his big black book.

Well, he did stop at last; and he had hardly got the last words out of his mouth, and shut to the heavy book-cover with a bang, when the young man jumped up in a hurry.

"Are you going?" says Mr. Owen. "Well, perhaps it is time. Come again as soon as you can, my young friend, and then we'll read the tenth chapter of the same book."

"Good night, Mr. Owen," cried Gwen's sweetheart, as he hurried down the stairs. "Good night, and much obliged."

"I'm *very* glad to have seen you," Mr. Owen called after him. "Come again, whenever you like."

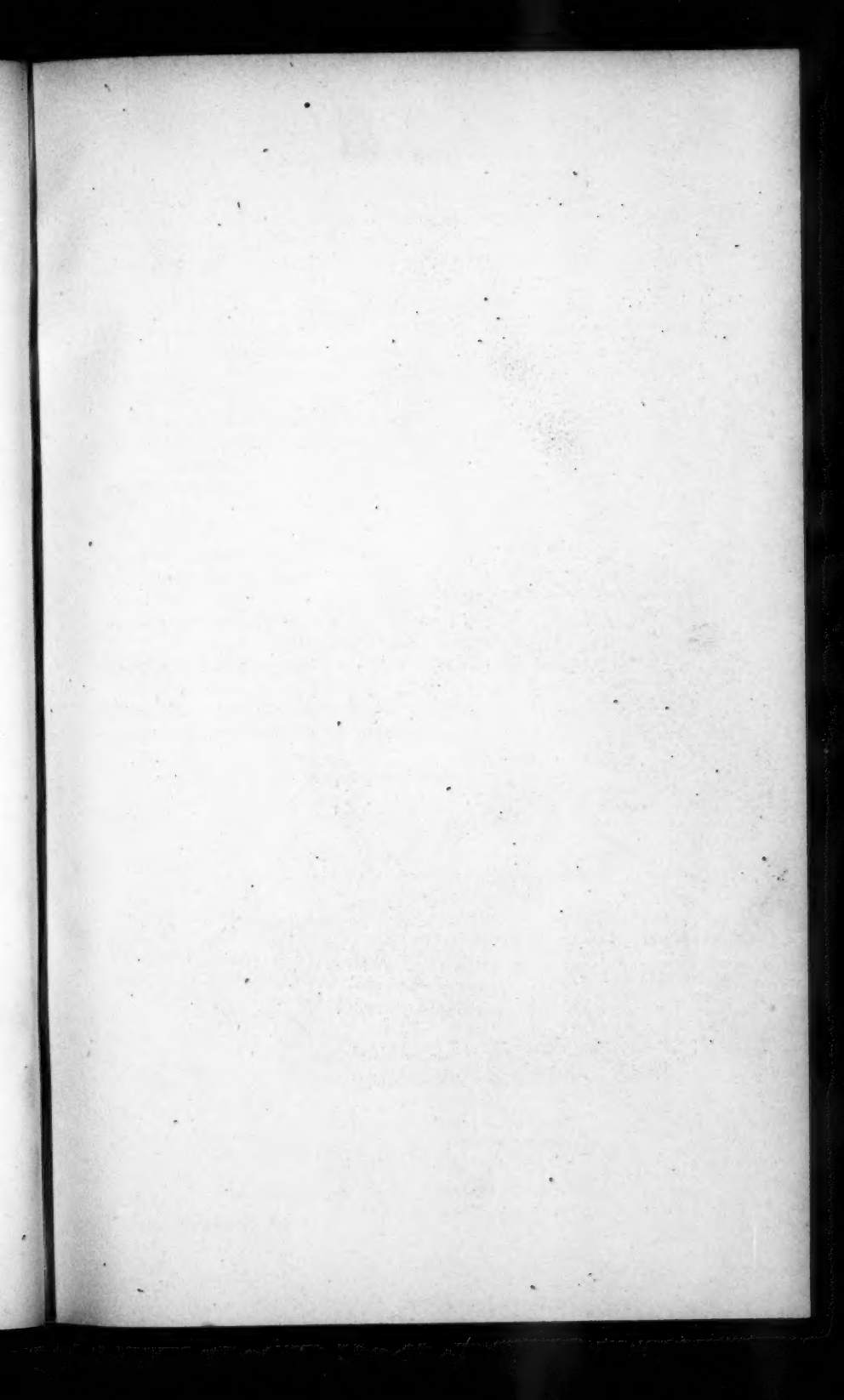
That is all the story; because, you see, he never did come again. And that was the way Mr. David Owen got rid of Gwen's sweetheart.



THE NEW YEAR.

WHAT time at Winter's touch,
 Earth doffs a little while her softer guise,
 And in his icy clutch
 Sweet nature like a swooning maiden lies;
 When the cold night stays long,
 And dim and scanty are the hours of day,
 And silent is the song
 Of piping birds that made the woodland gay;
 When boding hearts own nought
 But joy afar and desolation near,
 To still the ungracious thought
 Comes the rich promise of the glad New Year.
 Deep must the diver grope,
 When he would bring the purest pearl to light;
 And the fair gem of hope
 Could not be ours if all the way were bright.

SYDNEY GREY.





MR. GRUBB'S ADVENTURE.

R. AND E. TAYLOR.

M. ELLIOTT.